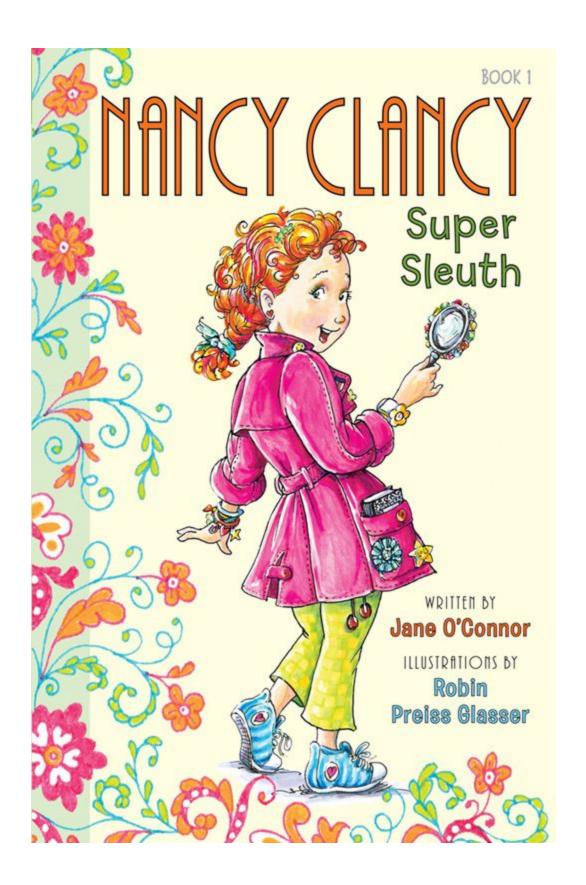


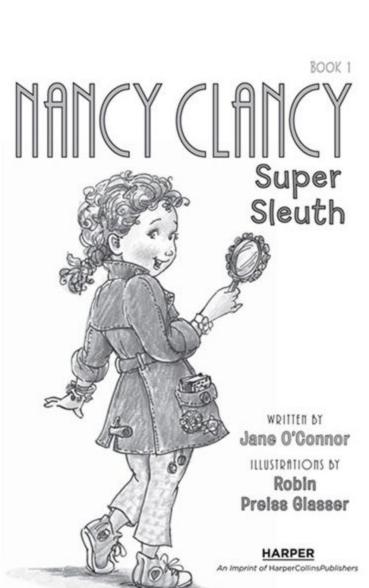
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#### **DEDICATION**

For my superb mother-in-law, Marge O'Connor —J.O'C.

For Aaron: alias, Mr. Dude —R.P.G.: alias, A.O.

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# CHAPTER 1



Nancy Clancy was all set to solve a mystery. She had a fancy magnifying glass complete with rhinestones. She had a spiral notepad and a flashlight. She had sunglasses, a hat with a floppy brim, and a pink trench coat. (A trench coat was the kind of raincoat that detectives wore.) She had superb detective skills. She was naturally nosy. So she was good at snooping. (Investigating was the professional word for snooping.)

Really the only thing Nancy was missing was a mystery.

"If only more criminals lived around here," she said to her father. He was at the kitchen table reading the Sunday sports pages.

"What?" he said without looking up.

"Nobody ever gets kidnapped. I bet there's never been a jewel heist." Then, in case her dad didn't know, Nancy added, "That means a jewel robbery."

Nancy sighed. "I wish we lived someplace like River Heights." That was where Nancy Drew lived. Nancy loved the

Nancy Drew books. She had read five so far. "In River Heights, criminals are lurking around every corner."

"Mmmmm. Sounds fun," her dad murmured.

Nancy's mother came into the kitchen. Nancy's little sister trailed behind her. She had on blue flippers that made a slapping sound as she walked.

"Have either of you seen JoJo's snorkel mask?" Nancy's mom asked.



Nancy's little sister hardly ever took off her snorkel mask or flippers. JoJo and her friend Freddy liked to pretend they were deep-sea divers searching for buried treasure.

Nancy's mom poured herself coffee. "We've looked everywhere. It's a mystery where it went."

Mystery! Nancy just heard the magic word. Okay, so it wasn't a big-deal mystery. But all great detectives had to start somewhere. She spread her arms. "Ta-da! Nancy Clancy, Super Sleuth, at your service."

"Aw, honey." Her mom smiled. "You'll look for it?"

"Sure. My rates are very reasonable." Nancy paused. "Only kidding. You're family. So my services are free."

Nancy went and slipped on her pink trench coat. It was important to dress like a professional. "JoJo, I just need to ask

you a few questions," she said, pulling the notepad from her pocket. "Trust me. We'll get to the bottom of this."



At that moment, Bree appeared at the back door. She was wearing a trench coat too. (Hers was purple.)

"JoJo left this at our house." Bree was holding a snorkel mask.

"Thanks!" Nancy's mom said. Then she turned to Nancy. "Sorry, sweetie."

Nancy scowled. Her first case was closed before it even got opened.

"I have to pick up a book for my mother. It's at the twins' house," Bree told Nancy. "Come with me."



# CHAPTER 2



The book for Bree's mom was in the Polskys' mailbox. Nancy and Bree were about to walk back home when Bree held a finger to her lips. "Shh. Listen."

Nancy could hear the Polsky twins arguing in their backvard.

"No fair!" Wanda shouted. "I get to pitch now."

"No! It's still my turn!" Rhonda said.

"Is not!"

Rhonda and Wanda were a year younger than Nancy and Bree. They were both superb at sports and very nice—except to each other. They got into lots of fights. Not just yelling fights, but hitting fights.

"Let's investigate!" Nancy said. She looked around. "The coast is clear!"

The girls dropped to their knees and crawled to the side of the twins' house. They tiptoed along the wall, their backs pressed flat against it. Silent as cats, they stopped at the back porch and hid behind an outdoor grill. Neither twin had spotted them. It was like Nancy and Bree were invisible. They smiled and high-fived each other.

"Here comes my fastball." Rhonda started spinning her arm around like a pinwheel.



"I quit." Wanda threw down her mitt.

"I'm not playing anymore." She started to stomp off.

Rhonda spun her arm around once more and let go of the ball.

Just in time, Wanda saw the ball whizzing right at her. She sprang forward to catch it.

Oops! She missed.

Double oops! She stumbled and landed facedown on the ground.

Ooh! That had to hurt! Nancy peeked over the top of the grill. "Wanda's bleeding! She split her lip."



"I can't look." Bree stayed hunched down. She hated the sight of blood.

Nancy watched Wanda pull herself up. She was crying. Blood was all over her mouth and chin. Her hands, too. Wanda looked like something out of a horror movie!

"You did that on purpose!" Wanda yelled at Rhonda. "I'm gonna get you back. I'm—I'm gonna tell Nancy what you did the other day!"

Rhonda froze for a second.

Nancy did too.

"You swore you wouldn't tell!" Rhonda shouted.

"Tough. I'm telling Nancy."

Nancy wanted to pop up from behind the grill and shout, "Tell me what?" But Bree grabbed her by the arm and yanked her down.

"We're snooping, remember?" Bree hissed.

A moment later, the twins' dad appeared on the back porch. He looked mad. "Are you two fighting again?" he said.

Then he took each of them by the arm and marched them inside the house.



# CHAPTER 3



So? What is Rhonda scared I'll find out? What secret has Wanda been keeping?" Nancy made her voice go soft and spooky. "It's the secret of the twins." She giggled. "Doesn't it sound like a Nancy Drew mystery?"

The girls were in Nancy's backyard at Sleuth Headquarters. When they grew up, they planned to open a detective agency together. It would be called Partners in Crime Fighting. They had made superb business cards already.

"Maybe Rhonda spread a mean rumor about you," Bree said. "Like you smell or have cooties."

"Rhonda's my friend. What motive would she have?" Ooh la la! Nancy felt all tingly just saying the word "motive." It meant the reason for doing something bad.

"W-e-l-l." Bree drew the word out, like she was thinking really hard. "Maybe you did something mean to Rhonda and she's paying you back."

Nancy shook her head. "I didn't do anything."

"Maybe it's something you don't even realize you did. But it got Rhonda mad. Really mad."

"And so now Rhonda is seeking revenge?" Nancy added. Bree nodded.

Double ooh la la! Nancy's eyes lit up. There was something thrilling about this idea. "Maybe she's set up a booby trap to get me!" Nancy pictured Rhonda digging a deep hole in her yard and covering it with grass and branches. As soon as Nancy walked over it, she'd plunge into darkness. No one would hear her cries for help.



Suddenly Nancy heard her mother calling her.

"Nancy, are you in the clubhouse?"

Nancy stuck her head out. "Mom, I told you before. It's not our clubhouse anymore. It's Sleuth Headquarters."

"Sorry. I forgot. Have you finished your paragraph for tomorrow?"

"Um, not exactly," Nancy answered.

"Have you started it?"

"Um, not exactly."

"Bree, I'm afraid you'll have to go home, and Nancy"— Nancy's mother pointed to the house—"get cracking!" Nancy headed to her room. Nancy Drew was so lucky. She never had to drop a case because of homework.

Tomorrow Nancy and all the other kids in her class had to bring in something special. "A memento" was what her teacher, Mr. Dudeny, had called it. The memento couldn't be a video game or a new pair of sneakers. A memento needed to be something personal, like a photo of a dead person in your family from long ago.

"Write a paragraph about what the memento means to you. But don't sign your name," Mr. Dudeny said. "Keep it a secret. We'll have fun guessing who each memento belongs to."

"Oh! So they'll be mystery mementos," Nancy said.

"Exactly," Mr. Dude told her. "I'm bringing something too. Then on Tuesday all the mystery mementos will be on display for Family Day."

Nancy planned to bring *The Witch Tree Symbol*, which was a Nancy Drew book. It was special because long ago it had belonged to Nancy's neighbor, Mrs. DeVine. On the cover Nancy Drew looked different. Her clothes and hairdo were old-fashioned.

The only problem was that Nancy wanted her memento to be unique—something nobody else had. What if Bree's mystery memento was the Nancy Drew book that Mrs. DeVine had given *her*? Bree had already written her paragraph days ago. She never left homework for the last minute.



So Nancy sent a message to Bree in their Top-Secret Special Delivery mailbox. It was a basket on a rope strung between Nancy's bedroom window and Bree's.

What is your memento? She wrote the message in secret code. Only the two of them knew it. They needed a secret code if one of them was ever in danger and had to send for help. Nancy rang a bell to let Bree know mail was coming. Then she pulled the rope until the basket reached Bree's window.

Uqtta. Ot. F vqnf wv pqv vq vgnn.

—Bree

A few minutes later, a message came back. Bree's was in secret code too. It took Nancy a while to understand it. (In secret-code talk that was called deciphering a message.)

Bree had written: Sorry. Mr. D told us not to tell.

```
THE SECRET CODE EXPOSED! (Shhhhhhh!!!)
A = C
B = D
C = E
D = F
E = G
F = H
G = I
H = J
I = K
J = L
K = M
L = N
M = O
N = P
O = Q
P = R
Q = S
R = T
S = U
T = V
U = W
V = X
W = Y
X = Z
Y = A
Z = B
```

Ooh, Bree could be exasperating sometimes!

Nancy thought about writing another message. But writing in code took so long. Of course, she could just pick up the phone or open the window and shout. Nancy would say, "Can you just tell me if you're bringing a Nancy Drew book? I am only asking because I don't want to bring in the same thing!"

But it wouldn't do any good. Bree was obstinate—that meant stubborn. In the end, Nancy decided to bring in a sparkling chunk of rock that looked like gold. She wanted kids to have a hard time figuring out who it belonged to. So when she wrote her paragraph, Nancy disguised her handwriting.

This glittering rock is called pyrite. Another name for it is fool's gold. That's because it looks like genuine gold. Long ago in days of yore, miners would find a chunk and think they had struck it rich. The joke was on them. Pyrite is not worth a lot of money. But it is still magnificent. I chose this memento because it was a present from my best friend, Bree. She bought it in a gift shop at a famous science museum in New York City.

It was quite a superb paragraph, if Nancy did say so herself. She had used vivid, interesting words. Mr. Dudeny would like that. Then something caught Nancy's eye. In one sentence there was a dead giveaway. Everyone would know Nancy had written it. Quickly she erased the words "my best friend, Bree." Instead she wrote "an acquaintance of mine."



Nancy put the rock and her paragraph in her backpack. Not even five minutes later, the mail bell rang again.

Bree's message said, I just saw the twins drive off with their parents. We can go back and snoop in their yard. Maybe we'll find the booby trap!

Nancy grabbed her trench coat. Bree was already waiting for her on the sidewalk.

Bree whistled on the way over to the twins' house. Whistling was a superb detective skill. It made it seem like they were just out for some fresh air. No one would ever suspect they were snooping.

At first glance, the twins' yard looked the same as it had this morning—grass, trees, a swing set in back, lots of sports stuff everywhere. Nancy, however, was very observant. That meant she noticed stuff that other people didn't. Noticing stuff was also a superb detective skill. It kind of made up for not being able to whistle.

What Nancy noticed now was a pile of branches near the swing set.

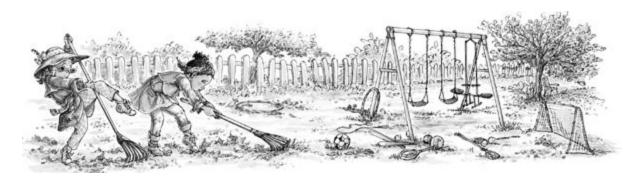
"Bree, look, a clue! I bet those branches are left over from when Rhonda made the booby trap!"

Bree clutched Nancy's arm. "Oh! I'm getting chills!"

A couple of large leaf rakes were on the porch. "I have an idea," Nancy said.

By pushing the rakes in front of them up and down the yard, the girls would spot the hidden trap before either of them fell into it. Unfortunately, the yard was pretty big. They hadn't covered much ground when they heard a car. It was pulling into the twins' driveway!

Bree and Nancy dropped the rakes and scrammed. They ran through the lilac bushes in between the twins' house and Mrs. DeVine's. They dashed across Mrs. DeVine's yard, wiggled through the hedge that separated her yard from Nancy's, and hid inside Headquarters.



Whew! That was a close call. But they were safe! They collapsed into the beanbag chairs.

"You really think there's a booby trap?" Bree asked. She sounded doubtful now.

"More and more, I'm sure of it. We need to search that whole yard. But let's sneak back under cover of darkness." That meant at night but sounded way more dangerous. They'd have to use flashlights. There'd be spooky night noises. Nancy could picture it all!

"We're not allowed out after dark," Bree pointed out.

Nancy knew that. She just didn't want to be reminded of it. Not right now. It was more fun picturing the two of them sneaking around in the dark.

Nancy sighed. It was awfully difficult to be a glamorous detective when your bedtime was eight thirty.



# CHAPTER 4



The cowboy hat is Robert's memento, Nancy wrote. She was filling in the blanks on her Mystery Memento sheet. Mr. Dudeny had handed a sheet to each kid. Then he said, "Go to it, Dudes."

All the mystery mementos were on a table by the windows.

The cowboy hat was easy. Robert used to live in Texas.

The glass mouse is Bree's memento, Nancy wrote.

Bree owned lots of tiny glass animals. She kept them on a special shelf in her room. See? I knew right away. You could have told me. Nancy didn't say those words out loud. She just thought them. Nancy figured that sometimes she and Bree could read each other's minds.

Two kids had brought in shells. One was white with brown specks. The other was white and purple. *The white-and-brown shell is Clara's memento*, Nancy wrote. Clara had not disguised her handwriting.

The paragraph for the other shell was typed. It said, I found this shell on a beach in Florida. We stayed at a hotel with three pools. My family had a suite. Suites are bigger and cost more than regular hotel rooms. I had the best time ever in Florida.

The white-and-purple shell had to belong to Grace. Grace bragged all the time about her trip to Florida.

"Hey! No fair, you're peeking!" Nancy said. Grace was sneaking a look at her sheet.



"I'm not! I guessed yours already," Grace said. "It's the bead bracelet."

"Maybe yes, maybe no." Nancy smiled. *Ha-ha! You are* sadly mistaken. That's fancy for wrong, wrong, wrong! Nancy didn't say this out loud either. She was not friends with Grace. Grace would never be able to read her mind.

Nancy went around the table. Hmmm. Who did the snow globe with the Statue of Liberty belong to? And what about the shark teeth? Or the swim trophy from Sighing Pines Day Camp? Nancy was stumped. She stopped at a big deep-blue marble. Bree was looking at it too. Inside it was a white swirl. The marble was taped to the table so it wouldn't fall off.

"Whose is it, you think?" Nancy said to Bree and Clara.

"It's gorgeous," Clara said. "That's my favorite color blue."

"I bet I know who it belongs to," Grace said. "But I'm not telling."

Nancy ignored her. "It looks like a precious jewel." Nancy held up her hand and imagined the marble was a fancy ring on her finger. Then she read the paragraph.



My grandfather gave me this. He taught me how to play a game with marbles. It's a lot of fun, and I got pretty good at it. When he was a boy, all his friends played the game together. But most kids today don't know how. I can teach everybody the rules.

The paragraph talked about teaching. Was that a clue? Hmmm. Nancy tapped her pencil eraser against her lip. Maybe the marble belonged to Mr. Dudeny.

At the end of the day, the kids revealed which mementos were theirs.

"Mine is the potato that looks like a witch's head," Lionel said.

"I knew it!" lots of kids said at once. Nancy had guessed right too. Lionel was such a goofball.

Besides Bree, only Robert and Tamar figured out Nancy's memento. The other kids probably figured she'd bring in something fancier.

Mr. Dudeny went last. "I brought in the marble."

"Superb!" Nancy punched her fist in the air. "I guessed it was yours, Mr. D."

Grace said, "I got thirteen right. That's really good, isn't it, Mr. Dude?"

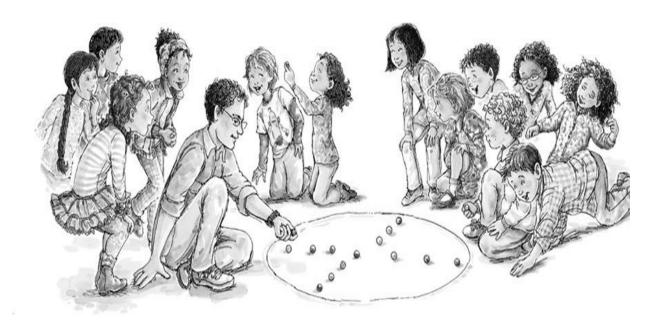
"This isn't a test," Mr. Dudeny said. "Guessing was just for fun. Your paragraphs are enthralling. That means I found them very, very interesting. So, Dudes? Want to learn how to play marbles?"

Everybody crowded around Mr. Dudeny while he drew a chalk circle on the floor. In the middle he made a plus sign with thirteen smaller marbles.

He held up the big blue marble. "This is the shooter. It shoots the little marbles."

"Hey, I'm a marble. Ooh! Ooh! I got shot!" Lionel clutched his chest and staggered around.

"If you shoot a marble outside the circle, you get a point," Mr. D explained. "The player with the most points wins. I used to be pretty good."



He bent down on one knee. He put his blue shooter outside the circle. A flick of his thumb sent it whizzing toward the little marbles. Three got hit. When they stopped rolling, two were outside the circle.

"Ooh. Can we try?" Robert asked.

Mr. Dudeny said, "It just so happens I brought a bunch of shooters." He started handing them out. Robert got one with orange stripes. Lionel got one that looked like a bloodshot eyeball. Nancy got a green shooter with sparkles inside.

"No fair! Yours is prettier than mine," Grace said to Nancy, and pushed in front of her. "Can I go first, Mr. D? Can I?"

"Whoa, no pushing. Everybody will get a turn."

Shooting marbles was harder than it looked. Nancy didn't get any points.

"Don't feel bad," Bree said. "I stink too."

When it was almost time to go home, Mr. D scooped up the little marbles. Then he passed a bag around to collect the shooters.

"Hey! Watch this." Lionel held the eyeball marble between his thumb and his pointer finger. He made a fist and rubbed both his hands together. When he opened them, the eyeball marble was gone.

"Pretty good trick!" their teacher said.

"It's not a trick," Lionel insisted. "It's magic."

"Then do some more magic and make it reappear." Mr. Dudeny waited until Lionel dug inside his sleeve for the marble.

"Aw, rats," said Lionel. "I wanted to keep it."

Mr. Dudeny was retaping the beautiful blue shooter to the table when the bell rang.

"Adios, Dudes. See you tomorrow on Family Day."



# CHAPTER 5



**B** efore dinner, Nancy was at Headquarters. She was reading about how to make disappearing ink. Suddenly the curtain parted. She expected to see Bree. Instead, there was Rhonda.

"Uh, hi, Nancy. Your mom said you were out here. Um, look, I"—Rhonda shifted from leg to leg—"I came over to tell you something."

Well, this was an interesting development! Had Rhonda come to confess?

Nancy smiled an encouraging smile. She waited for Rhonda to drop to her knees and start sobbing about the horrible thing she'd done. And because Nancy was so kindhearted, she'd say, "Of course I forgive you, Rhonda."

"Uh, look, Nancy..." Rhonda seemed about to blurt something out but then stopped. When she spoke, all she said was, "Want to come over and play soccer? My dad just set up a goal in our yard."

What? So Rhonda wasn't here to confess? Then she must have come over to lure Nancy into the trap!

"It'll be fun," Rhonda said.

Oh, right! It'll be a ton of fun to fall into some hole you dug. So a hundred years from now, a kid will be playing in your yard and discover a bunch of bones—my bones!

"No," Nancy said. "Maybe some other time." As in, never! "Well, then—uh, bye, I guess," Rhonda said.

"No, wait!" Nancy pulled Rhonda inside and sat her in one of the beanbag chairs. Now was her chance to make Rhonda talk.

"Stay. Have a snack." She handed Rhonda a bag of cookies. On TV shows detectives sometimes got suspects to blab by acting really friendly. Nancy figured she'd give it a try.

"It sure is great to see you, Rhonda," Nancy said.

"Huh? You see me all the time." Rhonda nibbled on a cookie.

"I know. But it's always great." Nancy paused. "That's because we're friends, right?"

"Yeah, sure." She took another cookie and stood up. "I better get home."



Nancy had to think fast.

"Look, Rhonda. I don't think you came here because you wanted to play soccer. Tell me why you really came over."

Rhonda avoided Nancy's eyes. "I—I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, I think you do," Nancy said.



Suddenly Rhonda slumped back down in the beanbag chair. Nancy poured a glass of water and handed it to her.

"Make it easy on yourself, Rhonda, and tell me the real reason you came over. I can tell you want to confess."

Rhonda took a sip. "Well—" She started to speak when Nancy's mother barged into Headquarters.

"Your mom called," she told Rhonda. "She wants you home."

Rhonda sprang from the chair. "See you!" she cried, and was gone.

"I was working on a case, Mom. I was about to crack it wide open when you came in."

"My bad, Sherlock.... Listen. I bought strawberries for dessert. Want to help make whipped cream?"

"I guess." Nancy followed her mother to the kitchen. How come Nancy Drew never ran into the problems that Nancy Clancy did, trying to solve a mystery? Of course, Nancy Drew didn't have a mother. There was just her father, Carson Drew, and a kindly housekeeper named Hannah. Nancy felt sorry for Nancy Drew not having a mother. But maybe Mrs. Drew would have messed up her cases too.





urry, honey!" Nancy's mom called. "Mom, I can't find one of my bracelets." Nancy needed it to complete her outfit for Family Day.

"Really. It's time to go," her mom said. "We don't want to be late."

Nancy came downstairs, and right away she saw the bracelet she'd been looking for.

It was on JoJo's wrist.

Nancy pointed. "That's my bracelet!"

"Sorry!" JoJo said. Right away, she took off the bracelet and went to get her jacket.

"She always takes stuff without asking," Nancy said to her parents.



"Don't be mad, Nancy." JoJo clasped her hands together. "Please don't be mad."

"Okay, okay," Nancy said.

On the walk to school, JoJo slipped her hand into Nancy's and skipped the whole way.

The Clancys were among the first to arrive in room 3D. After saying hi to Mr. D, Nancy steered her parents to the mementos table.

"Voilà!" She pointed to her chunk of pyrite. "I hope you'll find my paragraph enthralling."

Before long, the classroom filled up with families. Bree had brought a disposable camera. So Nancy posed like a model by her chunk of fool's gold. Then Nancy took a photo of Bree with her glass mouse. Then Bree took a photo of JoJo and Freddy together.



Lionel was dragging his parents over to see the witch potato.

"Smile, Lionel," Bree said.

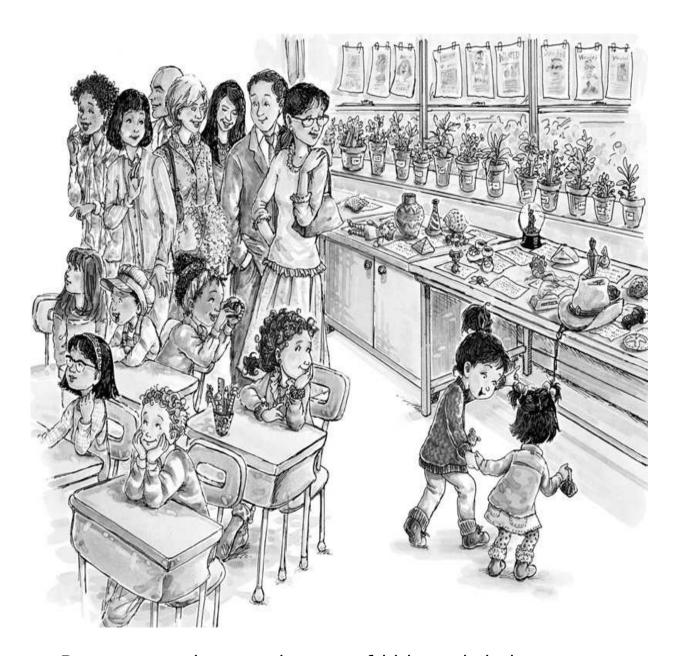
"Wait!" Lionel said, holding up the potato. "Okay, now!" Lionel's tongue was hanging down on his chin. His eyes were rolled so far back, all you could see were the whites.

"Stop that, Lionel!" his mother scolded. "Nobody else is acting silly."

Nancy's mom and dad looked at each other and smiled.

"What?" Nancy asked.

Her father nodded at Lionel. "That was me, twenty-five years ago. The class clown."



Bree snapped more pictures of kids and their mementos. Then they joined a bunch of kids at the snack table while Mr. Dudeny talked to the parents.

"I am so glad we could share our mementos with you," he said. "This is part of our unit on families. Earlier in the year, we made family trees. Soon each child will begin writing an autobiography. In art they will make family collages, and in..."

Nancy tuned out the rest of what Mr. Dudeny was saying. She watched JoJo and smiled. JoJo was taking Yoko's little

sister around the memento table. Hariko was only three. JoJo was holding her hand and pointing out different stuff to her. It was like JoJo was pretending to be a big sister.

Deep down, Nancy was glad JoJo had come to Family Day. She hugged her sister when it was time for all the families to leave.

"Au revoir!" Nancy said, waving.

Bree kept snapping photos all day—at lunch, in the school yard, during art, and lots more in their classroom.

"One left," she said. Her desk was next to Nancy's.

"Take another of me." Nancy had her creative-writing journal out. She put a dreamy look on her face and held a pencil with her pinky finger up. "Do I look creative?"

"Bree!" Mr. Dudeny said. "Please put the camera away and get to work."

Nancy loved creative writing. She was writing a mystery called "The Vanishing Jewel." It starred a young detective named Lucette Fromage. Lucette had long, curly tresses. "Tresses" was such a beautiful word for hair. Lucette was also the same age as Nancy.

Lucette Fromage sprinted after the robbers, Nancy wrote. Mr. Dudeny liked vivid—that meant colorful—words. "Sprinted" was way more vivid than "ran."

"Be careful, Lucette Fromage!" the countess shouted from the steps of her mansion. "My sapphire blue ring is priceless. But I don't want you to get maimed."

The robbers laughed like maniacs. "You'll never catch us!" Then they drove off in an ugly used car.

It was hard trying to write the chase scene. Lucette was too young to drive. Ah! Nancy decided to give Lucette really fast, strong legs. Lucette hopped on her bike and began pedaling at seventy miles an hour, Nancy wrote. Soon she was right behind the robbers.

At one point, Nancy turned around and looked up. Mr. Dudeny was standing behind her desk. He was reading over

her shoulder. "Superb!" he said.

"Dudes, listen to all the vivid words Nancy has used," Mr Dudeny said.

Nancy read out loud to the class. She explained that "priceless" meant really expensive and "maimed" meant hurt. Then she said, "At first I was going to make the stolen ring be a diamond ring. But I changed it to a sapphire after seeing Mr. Dudeny's beautiful blue marble."

"Hey! Look!" Grace said in surprise. She was pointing to the mementos table.

The crisscrossed pieces of tape were still stuck on the table. But the marble was gone.



"No worries. It must have gotten unstuck and rolled off," Mr. Dudeny said. "Let's search."

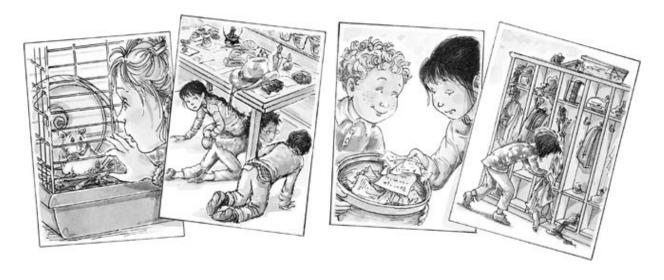
Grace checked the wastebaskets. Yoko, Lionel, and Tamar went through the book bins in case the marble had dropped into one. Nancy and Bree searched under the radiators. Nancy saw a dead bug, but no marble.

"It's not in Eric Clapton's cage, either," Clara said. "I checked."

Grace rolled her eyes. "Cla-ra! How could that huge marble get inside the hamster's cage?"

"I don't know. But I checked anyway." Clara looked upset. "How could it have disappeared?"

"I'm sure it'll turn up," Mr. Dudeny kept saying.



"I think somebody stole it!" Grace said, in a low voice so Mr. D couldn't hear.

"You think she's right?" Nancy asked Bree.

"It does seem suspicious."

"Then our classroom might be a crime scene!" This struck Nancy as both thrilling and upsetting.

Right before going home, Bree aimed her camera at the mementos table. "Maybe we can get the pictures back today." She paused and snapped her last picture. "Who knows? There could be a clue!"

Ooh la la! Now Nancy and Bree had two mysteries to solve—the Secret of the Twins ... and the Case of the Missing Marble!





**B** ree's mom came back with the photos late that afternoon. The girls looked through them at Sleuth Headquarters.

Bree giggled. "Look at Lionel."

Nancy was busy studying some other photos. "I am trying to establish the time of the crime." In sleuth talk, establish meant figuring out something.

"These two photos are clues." Nancy handed Bree one of Bree's parents at the display table. "See the clock on the wall?"

"Yeah. It says eleven," Bree said.

"The blue marble is still there." Nancy held up a different photo. "Now look." Everybody except Bree was standing behind the display table. Mr. Dudeny was in the photo too. But the marble was gone.



"Ooh, I have goosebumps!" Bree said.

"Me too! Too bad the clock got cut off in this one."

"Doesn't matter," Bree said. "I remember I took it right after lunch."

"Hmmm. Lunch is over at one fifteen. So that means the marble disappeared sometime between eleven and one fifteen." Nancy heard herself and stopped. "Oh, Bree! We are really sleuthing! Nancy Drew would be so proud."

Bree flung her arms around Nancy. "Partner, we are going to crack this case wide open!"

At dinner that evening, Nancy's dad said, "My, my. Just the other day you were complaining about the lack of crime around here." He paused to spoon some carrots onto his plate. "And now look! Grand theft at school!"

"Doug, stop teasing," her mom said.

"Looks like an inside job to me," her dad went on, ignoring a loud sigh from her mom.

"I don't feel good. My tummy hurts." JoJo climbed into Mom's lap.

Nancy's dad turned to her and said, "So? Was anybody ever alone in the classroom?"

Nancy had already thought about that. "No. Only Mr. Dudeny. He stays in while we're at recess."



"Hmmm. Doubtful he stole his own marble ... unless, of course, your teacher is losing his marbles." Her dad laughed at his own joke. Her mother shook her head and carried JoJo upstairs to lie down until she felt better.





Later that evening, Nancy lay on her bed, pondering. Pondering was like thinking, only fancier. Next to her on her night table was *The Witch Tree Symbol. How would Nancy Drew go about solving the Case of the Missing Marble?* she wondered.

Nancy picked up the book and opened it. She didn't expect to find any answers in it. She just liked looking at the first page. In the top corner it said *Marjorie Sneff* in curly script. That had been Mrs. DeVine's name when she was a child in days of yore.

"Sacre bleu!" Nancy said out loud. In French that meant "Oh my gosh!"

There was a dark brown fingerprint by Mrs. DeVine's name. It had never been there before. And the page was torn.

"JoJo!" Nancy hollered. She charged into her sister's room. JoJo was on the floor, playing with all the things in her plastic treasure chest. Evidently her tummy felt all better.

She was eating an Oreo. Dark brown crumbs were all over her mouth and fingers.

She looked up, saw Nancy, and snapped her treasure chest shut. She had a guilty look on her face.



"You're not allowed to touch my stuff!" Nancy shoved the open book at her sister. "Look what you did!"

"I didn't do that!"

"You did too! Look at your hands. This fingerprint was made by someone eating an Oreo cookie!"

Quickly JoJo hid her hands behind her back. "It wasn't me! I don't like those books. They're scary."

Nancy ran to find their mother. She was halfway down the hall when she stopped. Maybe JoJo was telling the truth. The covers of the Nancy Drew books did scare her.

Nancy examined the fingerprint in the book more closely. It was big. It was probably a thumbprint.

"Come with me," she told JoJo. They went into Nancy's room. Nancy took her sister's hand and pressed her thumb onto a page in her detective notepad. A brown thumbprint appeared. It was the same color as the thumbprint in the Nancy Drew book. But it was much smaller.

JoJo was innocent after all.



"I'm sorry I blamed you," Nancy told her.

"That's okay," JoJo said. "Will you read to me?"

"Yeah, I guess."

They went back to JoJo's room. JoJo pushed her treasure chest under her bed and found her favorite book. She handed it to Nancy. It was about a pirate ship and buried treasure.

The whole time Nancy was reading, she kept thinking about the brown thumbprint in her book. Who besides Bree and JoJo had been in her room lately?

Ooh la la! It hit her. The twins! They had come over a few days ago after soccer. Had Rhonda been eating anything chocolatey? No, Nancy didn't think so. But maybe the thumbprint wasn't chocolate. Maybe it was dirt! That made sense. Everybody came back from soccer all muddy. Nancy never would have let Rhonda touch the Nancy Drew book with dirty hands. So when did Rhonda commit the crime?

Suddenly Nancy remembered. Mrs. DeVine had called about coming for tea. While Nancy was on the phone, the twins were alone in her room. Double ooh la la! All the

pieces of the puzzle were falling into place. Rhonda had probably picked up the Nancy Drew book just to look at it, and messed it up by mistake. Rhonda was scared to confess. And so Rhonda made Wanda promise not to tell Nancy.

It all made sense. Still, Nancy had no proof. On TV, detectives always talked about fingerprint files. If a fingerprint was found at the scene of a crime, they could match it up with one in the files.

The trouble was, Nancy didn't have any other fingerprints of Rhonda's....

Or did she? Rhonda had been at Headquarters just yesterday. The glass of water!

Nancy flew downstairs.

"Wait! You didn't finish!" JoJo called.

Nancy grabbed her trench coat and a flashlight from the pantry. Her father was loading stuff into the dishwasher.

"Where are you going?"

"To Headquarters. I'll be right back."

Outside, Nancy clicked on the flashlight. She made her way under cover of darkness. Inside Headquarters, the glow from the flashlight cast spooky shadows.

There it was. The plastic glass with Tinker Bell on it. Nancy held it at the bottom so she wouldn't get her own prints on it.

Once she was back in the kitchen, she put the Tinker Bell glass on a counter. Then she turned to her father. "Dad, whatever you do, don't touch that glass! It's evidence!"



"Whew! Lucky you warned me!" he said.

There was no time for the Special Delivery mail basket. Nancy called Bree. She filled her in, then asked, "See if your mom will let you come over. And bring the kit!"

Bree's aunt had sent her a Junior Detective kit for her birthday. It had all sorts of superb stuff, including a bottle of fingerprint powder.

"This is so thrilling!" Bree said as she burst into the Clancys' kitchen. "I can't believe we're going to dust for prints."



Nancy's father stood by, watching. "Whatever it is, I swear I'm innocent! I'm a law-abiding man with a wife and children."

"Very funny, Dad," Nancy said as he left the room. She put on a pair of yellow rubber kitchen gloves. "This way no more prints will get on the glass." Very carefully she picked up the Tinker Bell glass. Bree sprinkled on some fingerprint powder.

Sure enough, five white, powdery fingerprints appeared. Bree was peering at the biggest one with the little magnifying glass from her kit. "Here's the thumbprint."

They took the glass upstairs. Nancy showed Bree the brown fingerprint in her Nancy Drew book.



"Now comes the test," Nancy said. Using her jeweled magnifying glass, she studied both thumbprints. So did Bree.

"Definitely a match!" Nancy said. "The thumbprints are identical! We have solved the Secret of the Twins. Just like real detectives."

Bree said, "So what happens next?"

The answer was obvious. "We solve the Case of the Missing Marble!" Nancy said.

"No, that's not what I meant. Will you confront Rhonda with the evidence?"

"Oh!" Nancy sank down onto her bed. "I have to think about it.... Rhonda should have just told me. I would have been mad. But not that mad."





N ancy's mom was wrong about the janitor finding Mr. Dudeny's blue marble.

"Still missing," Mr. D said when Nancy asked the next morning.

The missing marble was all anybody could talk about before the bell rang.

"Dudes, come on! It is only a marble," Mr. D told the class.

"But it was your mystery memento!" Yoko said.

"It was very beautiful!" Clara said.

"Your grandpa gave it to you!" Robert said. "That's important."

"The memories I have of my grandfather are what's most important. I'll have those forever. Listen. I hope the marble turns up. But let's not overreact.... Now please get out your spelling books."

Nancy opened her desk to get her book. Instead she got a nasty surprise.

There was a piece of lined paper with a message.

#### I THINK YOU STOLE THE MARBLE!



Nancy was so shocked, she jumped back in her seat.

"What? Is there a mouse?" Clara asked.

Nancy didn't answer. She was still staring at the note. How dare someone accuse her of stealing!

Mr. Dudeny came over to her. "Is something wrong?" Nancy nodded.

Mr. Dudeny took her outside into the hall.

Nancy showed him the message. It was written in green marker in big capital letters. The marker was going dry, so the letters looked like they were disappearing. It made the message look even meaner, and scarier, too.

Mr. Dude's lips were pressed together tightly.

"I swear I didn't take it, Mr. D!" Nancy felt tears start to prick her eyes.

"Nancy, of course you didn't. I don't think anybody took it. But I'd never, ever think that of you. You are a girl with a lot of integrity."

"Merci, Mr. D." She wasn't sure what integrity meant. But she could tell it was good.

After she returned to her seat, Mr. Dudeny held up the message. "This was in Nancy's desk."

Several kids gasped.

"Oh! That's so mean!" Clara said.

"Nancy is innocent!" Bree cried. She reached over and squeezed Nancy's hand.

"Clara is right. This is very hurtful. From the first day of school, we have talked about respecting one another's feelings. I expect the person who wrote this to come see me before the end of the day." Then Mr. Dudeny put the note in his desk.



He told the class to put away their spelling books. Instead, he got one of the books from the reading nook. "It's called *Thick and Thin*. And it's about friends trusting one another."

The story was about a boy who got into trouble after finding a twenty-dollar bill in a parking lot. Nancy couldn't pay attention. She kept saying to herself, *Somebody thinks I'm a thief*.

At one point Mr. Dudeny looked up from the book and said, "Grace, please stop doodling and listen."

"I am. I can do both at once," Grace answered.

Mr. Dudeny went over to Grace's desk. He crumpled up the piece of paper and tossed it into the wastebasket. Then he picked up the book again.

Throughout the morning, Nancy kept thinking about the message. By the time it was recess, she was way more than mad. She was furious. She felt outraged!

"Come on," Bree said. "If we run we can claim the top of the jungle gym before the fourth graders get it."

"Go ahead. I'll come in a second."

The classroom cleared out fast. Mr. Dudeny was at Clara's desk, going over her math problems. Clara often needed extra help.

On the way out, something made Nancy fish the crumpled piece of paper from the wastebasket. It was just a hunch.

Grace's doodles were in green marker. The marker was almost all dried out.

Nancy stormed outside to the yard. She spotted Grace over near the slides. She was jumping rope. A bunch of first graders were watching her and counting off the jumps.

"Sixteen ... seventeen ... eighteen ..."

Nancy waited until Grace lost her turn. Then Nancy cornered her. "It was you! You stuck that mean note in my desk!"

Grace blinked. "Says who?"

"Me. This"—Nancy shoved the doodle at Grace—"and the note are both in green marker, a green marker that is almost dry."



Grace looked caught for a second. Then she said, "Well—well, I wasn't trying to cover it up, so there. I don't care if you know it's me. I still think you're the thief."

"Why didn't you just say it to my face?" Then Nancy paused. "What makes you think I took it?"

"You kept saying how beautiful the marble was.... And that story you wrote, about the sapphire ring that got stolen."

Even to Nancy, it kind of made sense that Grace figured she was the thief.

"You wanted Mr. D's marble. So you took it!"

"I did not, Grace. Who knows? Maybe you did. And—and you're just trying to throw the blame on me."

Grace's mouth dropped open.

Ha! Got you, Nancy said to herself. Yet she didn't like how hard and mean she sounded.

"That's crazy!" Grace said. Her hands were on her hips. "Some dumb baby marble. Why would I want it?" Then all of a sudden Grace got a funny look on her face. "Are you going

to blab to Mr. Dudeny about me putting the note in your desk?"

"I'm not a tattletale. But you better tell him."

Grace shrugged. "Okay." Then she went back to wait for another turn at jump rope. Grace was an expert at jumping rope. She could do a perfect split. She was a great speller. And she never lost blinking contests. Still, Nancy wouldn't ever want to trade places with Grace.

"Nancy! Over here!" Bree, Tamar, and Clara called from the top of the jungle gym.

Nancy ran off to join her friends.





\*\*Okay. Let's get down to business," Bree said that afternoon. "We need to draw up a list of suspects."

They were in Bree's room. Nancy was staying at Bree's until her mom and JoJo came home.

WHO STOLE THE BLUE MARBLE? Bree wrote at the top of a page in her notepad. Bree had gorgeous handwriting—her capital Bs were especially lovely.

Lionel, Bree wrote. She looked up at Nancy. "I put him down because he likes to play tricks. Maybe he took the marble as a prank."

Nancy shook her head. "Lionel wouldn't go that far. Lionel's a goofball, but I don't think he took the marble."

"Yes, you're right." Bree crossed out Lionel's name.

Nancy bit her lip and thought. On TV the crook often turned out to be the person nobody suspected. "You think maybe Clara took it?"

"Clara? That's just crazy."

"She said it was beautiful and her favorite color.... Who knows? Maybe some evil force came over Clara and she was powerless to stop herself." Nancy made her hands into claws. "Before she realized what she was doing, Clara snatched the marble!"

"That's just crazy," Bree repeated. "Clara never even takes a Kleenex from the box on Mr. D's desk without asking."

"What about Grace?" Nancy and Bree said at the same time. Then they both shouted, "Jinx!" The rule with a jinx was you couldn't talk until somebody said your name. And Bree was usually very strict about jinxes. But she agreed to forget about it, just this once. Solving the case was more important.

"Bree, if I tell you something, will you keep it in the vault?" A vault was like a bank safe.



Bree shut her lips. Then she pretended to turn a key and lock her mouth.

"Grace wrote that mean message about me being the thief."

Bree gasped. "Grace is horrible. She's the worst person in our class! I bet she *is* the thief. Criminals always try to throw the blame on somebody else. That's why she wrote that message."

Nancy nodded. "I said that to her. And Grace was the one who first noticed the marble was missing."

"Well!" Bree threw out her arms as if that settled everything. "On TV shows, the person who reports a crime is always a prime suspect.... Plus, Grace cheats. Once she copied off my spelling test. Cheaters often grow up to be thieves. Grace just jumped from cheater to thief early."

Nancy had to admit, Bree was building a pretty solid case against Grace. Of course, they didn't have one major thing—evidence.

A few minutes later, Nancy heard her mom's car in the driveway.

"Gotta go," Nancy told Bree. "I really feel like we're closing in on this case."





N ancy burst into her house.

She found her mother upstairs. She was holding a thermometer.

"Mom, you won't believe what Grace did!" Then Nancy told her the story.

"You're right. I can't believe it!" She cupped Nancy's face in her hand and kissed her forehead. Then Nancy's mom asked, "Does your teacher know about this? Maybe I should speak to Grace's parents?"

"No, don't! Grace confessed to Mr. Dudeny. He's taking care of it. He told me before I left school. You don't need to call anybody! Promise!"

"Okay, okay. I promise."

"At first I felt awful. But all day long, kids in my class kept coming up to me. They all said how they knew I'd never steal anything." Nancy paused. "I never realized I had so much integrity." Her mom wrapped Nancy in a hug and planted another kiss on her forehead. "You sure do, kiddo!"

Nancy followed her down the hall to JoJo's room. JoJo was in bed. "Your teacher said you were fine all day." Mom bent down and stroked JoJo's cheek. Then she turned to Nancy. "As soon as we got home, JoJo started complaining again about her tummy hurting." She popped the thermometer under JoJo's tongue. "Maybe I should call Dr. Cornelia."

JoJo yanked out the thermometer. "No!"

A moment later, Nancy's mom read the thermometer. "No fever.... Maybe a little ginger ale will make you feel better?"



"Maybe." JoJo pulled the covers up to her chin.

Nancy's mom went downstairs.

Because Nancy felt sorry for her sister, she said, "Want to look through your treasures together?" It was one of JoJo's favorite things to do. Nancy started to pull out the plastic chest from under JoJo's bed.

"No! Go away!"

"Fine." Nancy headed back to her own room. "I was trying to be nice."

The phone started ringing.

"Nan, would you get it?"

It was Rhonda. She didn't bother saying hello. She started talking real fast. "Nancy, I got your special Nancy Drew book dirty, the one Mrs. DeVine gave you. And the page got torn. I didn't mean to. My hands were dirty. Please don't be mad. That's why I came over the other day. I was going to tell you, but I chickened out."

"It's okay, Rhonda," Nancy broke in. "I forgive you."

"You do? Oh, wow! Oh, phew! I was so worried you'd be mad. I felt horrible about it. My mom thought I was getting sick because I was acting so weird."

Nancy understood. Guilt could do horrible things to a person.

"All I can say is I'm really, really, really sorry, Nancy."

"Apology accepted!"

Nancy hung up the phone and went back to her room. She could hear her mom in JoJo's room.

"Is something bothering you?" Mom was saying. "Is there anything you want to tell me? I won't be mad."

Suddenly Nancy had a funny feeling in *her* tummy. She was thinking about what Rhonda had just said on the phone. How Rhonda's mom thought she was sick, when really Rhonda was just feeling guilty about Nancy's book.

Nancy bolted outside to Headquarters. She sat down and leafed through Bree's photos from Family Day again. She stopped at one of JoJo holding hands with Yoko's baby sister. JoJo was pointing at the marble. The next photo was of Freddy. He was by the display table too. JoJo and Hariko were off to one side. Nancy looked closer. JoJo was reaching for something on the table.



Nancy felt prickles on the back of her neck. Of course, the photo didn't prove anything. It wasn't evidence. Nancy put the pictures down and pondered. She thought about what Grace had said the other day: "Why would I steal some dumb baby marble?"

Most of all, Nancy thought about the way JoJo acted a minute ago when Nancy suggested looking through her treasure chest. Was there something inside it that JoJo didn't want Nancy to see?

It was like a bunch of arrows with blinking lights were all pointing straight at her sister. Taking Nancy's stuff was one thing. But taking someone else's stuff? That wasn't borrowing. That was stealing!

Nancy marched back into her sister's room. Their mother was gone. Nancy expected to find JoJo in bed. Instead she was on the floor, tying up one of her dolls.

"She was being bad. So I'm punishing her," JoJo said.

Nancy knelt down and fished around under JoJo's bed. She felt the treasure chest.

"Hey! What are you doing?"

Nancy didn't reply. She sat back on her heels. Her heart started thumping as she raised the lid.



There it was: the blue marble.

Nancy grabbed it and charged downstairs with JoJo running after her, howling at the top of her lungs, "Stop!"

Her father had just come through the front door. Her mom was waiting to kiss him hello.

"What's wrong?" they both said.

JoJo kept screaming and trying to grab the marble from Nancy.

Nancy cleared her throat. "I'm very sorry to inform you that JoJo stole Mr. Dudeny's blue marble."

Then Nancy opened her hand and revealed the evidence.



## CHAPTER 12



Nancy spread out the photos from Family Day on the kitchen table. "Voilà! See for yourself!" she said, pointing. "There's Jojo reaching for the marble. And here it is!"

"Nancy, JoJo's not on trial," her dad said. "So you can put away Exhibit A." JoJo was sitting on his lap, crying and hiccuping.

"Daddy, do you think this is funny?" Nancy plopped down in a chair. She was trying to be helpful. If her parents didn't watch out, JoJo could end up behind bars. She'd get nothing to eat but stale bread and stale water. Plus there was absolutely no way to look fancy in jail clothes.

"No, it's not funny," her dad said. "But it's not the crime of the century, either."

Nancy's mom handed JoJo a glass of water. Then her mom said, "Sweetie, why did you take the marble? You know that isn't right."

JoJo nodded miserably. Twin worms of snot were dripping down her nose.

"How about you tell us what happened," her mom said.



"Nancy will yell!"

"No, she won't," said Nancy's dad, while her mom leaned over and wiped JoJo's nose with a paper napkin.

JoJo sighed a big, heavy sigh. "I was being nice," she began. "Yoko's little sister wanted to see the marble. I tried lifting her. But she was heavy. So I picked up the marble and showed it to her." JoJo shrugged. She acted like that settled everything.

But Nancy's dad said, "And then?"

JoJo frowned. Reluctantly, she went on. "It was so pretty, like treasure.... I put the marble in my pocket and took it home. I wanted to keep it in my treasure chest." All of a sudden her face scrunched up again. "I'm a bad girl! I'm a very bad girl!" she cried, and covered her face with her hands.

Nancy couldn't help feeling sorry for her little sister. Maybe JoJo had been born with no integrity and couldn't help herself.

"No, you're not a bad girl," Nancy's mom said, stroking JoJo's hair. "You're a good girl, a good girl who did something wrong. But we'll fix it. Tomorrow we'll go to Nancy's school. And you'll give the marble back to her teacher."

JoJo was not happy hearing this. "I'll let Nancy give it back."

"Me! No way!"

"JoJo, you took the marble," her dad said. "So you need to give it back and tell Mr. Dudeny how sorry you are."

Well, finally a little justice, thought Nancy, though JoJo was getting off way too easily.

So, after dinner, once her sister was in bed, Nancy marched into her parents' room. "Aren't you going to punish JoJo? I think you should."

Her dad closed the book he was reading. "Exactly what did you have in mind? A year of hard labor?"

"Ha-ha, Daddy.... What if saying sorry doesn't stop JoJo from stealing more stuff?"

Her mother was doing a crossword puzzle. She looked up. "It stopped you."

"Me?" Nancy pointed at herself. "What are you talking about?"

Her mom put down the newspaper. "You don't remember? You once took a rhinestone hair clip that belonged to Mrs. DeVine."

"I beg your pardon. I did no such—!" Nancy stopped cold and blinked a couple of times. Ooh, actually, maybe she did remember. "Was it shaped like a bow? And did it have pink rhinestones?"

Her mother nodded. "Yep!"

The hair clip had been on Mrs. DeVine's night table. It was magnificent! Nancy remembered trying to clip it in her hair. Then, before she knew what she was doing, Nancy had slipped it into her pocket and taken it home. Just like JoJo.

Suddenly Nancy had a terrible thought: Maybe crime ran in the family!



"I found the hair clip under your pillow. Mrs. DeVine didn't even realize it was missing until I took you to return it."

It all came back to Nancy. "I was so scared. I thought Mrs. DeVine would never want to see me again! But she gave me a hug and we had a tea party."

"And see? Did you wind up on America's Most Wanted list? No!"

"Oh, Daddy!" Nancy said. Her father could be so exasperating. But then he came over and hugged her. "In my humble opinion, you have turned into quite a splendid girl. So maybe there's hope for your sister."

Maybe her dad was right. This was what Mr. Dudeny called "food for thought." And Nancy definitely needed to ponder it more. But first she needed to do something else.

She went to her room. After a little while, she sent the Top-Secret Special Delivery mail basket over to Bree's window. In it was a message. In secret code, Nancy had written:

Oggv og cv jgcfswctvgtu CUCR! Ygct dqwt vtgpej eqcv.

To decipher the code, see <u>The Secret Code Exposed</u>



## CHAPTER 13



You weren't supposed to crack the case by yourself!" Bree had on her mad face. Her lips were puckered so her mouth looked like a purse with the strings pulled tight. "We're Partners in Crime Fighting. *Partners*—that means we do stuff together."

Nancy was startled. This was not the reaction she expected. "Bree. I didn't mean to. Looking at your photos again made everything click."

Bree still looked mad.

"I'm sorry I solved the case alone," Nancy went on. "It was scary opening JoJo's treasure chest. Seeing that marble freaked me out! I wish you'd been there."

Bree's lips unpuckered a little. "The photos really were a clue?"

"A superb clue." Then Nancy said, "I bet you'll crack our next case. Then we'll be even."

Bree nodded. She was quiet for a moment. It was clear that she was pondering something. Then she said, "I'm happy JoJo turned out to be the culprit."

Now Nancy got angry. "Well, merci a bunch!"

"Wait. I'm not being mean," Bree answered. "But it was creepy thinking somebody in our class was a thief." She shuddered a little.

Okay, now Nancy understood. "Yes. I didn't even want it to be Grace."

Grace! Nancy would die—she would absolutely expire—if Grace found about JoJo. Nancy's mother planned to call Mr. Dudeny tonight. She promised Nancy that JoJo would confess tomorrow after everybody in the class had gone home.

"Bree, you are the only person I'm telling. My parents said I could because you are like family. But you have to swear up and down not to tell anyone."



"It's in the vault." Bree locked her lips with a pretend key. Then they hugged and said, "Bonsoir, chérie," which was French for "Good night, darling."

As they left Headquarters, Bree said, "In Nancy Drew, some evil-looking stranger always turns out to be the criminal. It's easy to tell who's bad because they've got ugly scars or sneer a lot. It's never a cute little kid like JoJo. And it would never, never be anyone in Nancy Drew's family."
Nancy Clancy giggled. "Of course not. Nancy Drew is an

only child!"

# **CREDITS**

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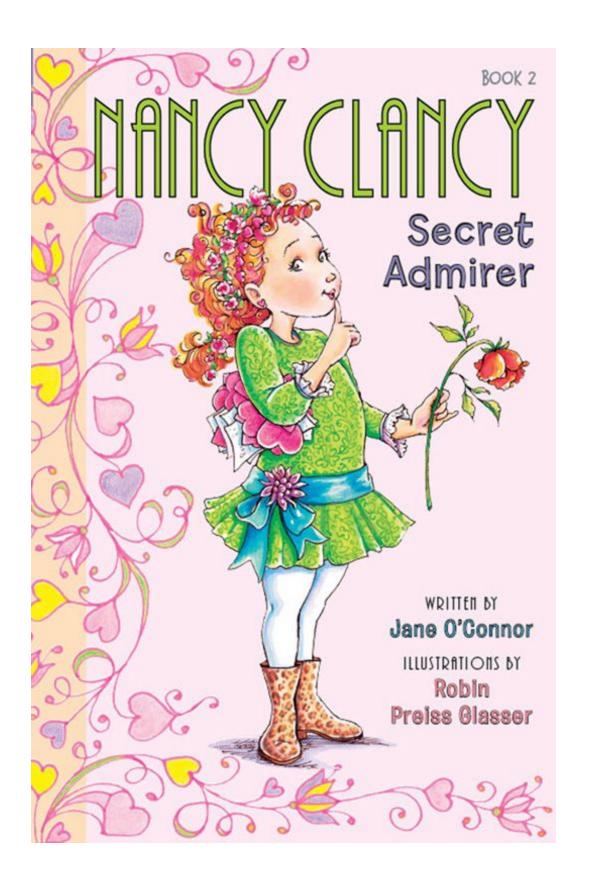
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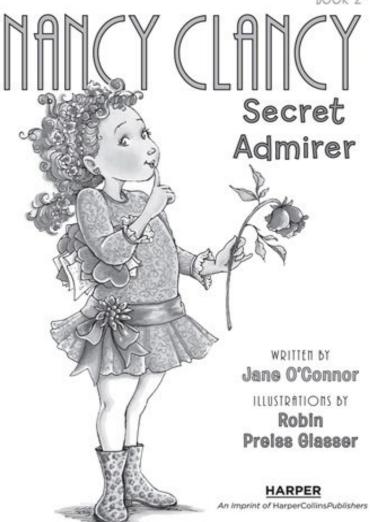
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BOOK 2



# **Dedication**

To Doug Stewart, from your out-in-the-open admirer —J.O'C.

For Garrett, Jessie's fiancé, which is a fancy word for *not*-so-secret admirer —R.P.G.

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**Credits** 

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n your marks, get set . . ." Mr. Dudeny paused for a second. "Go!"

Right away Nancy started counting. *One, two, three.* The tips of her fingers were pressed against her neck. *Four, five, six, seven, eight.* 

All the kids in room 3D were counting how many times their hearts beat in a minute. This was called taking your pulse.

Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two.

Mr. Dudeny was watching the seconds go by on the wall clock.

Forty-nine, fifty, fifty-one.



For the past week, room 3D had been learning about the heart. Real hearts didn't look anything like the hearts that Nancy drew.

Seventy-two, seventy-three.

Real hearts weren't even red like the ones on Valentine's Day cards.

Eighty-five, eighty-six.

Nancy closed her eyes and tried to feel all the blood that her heart was pumping around inside her. But she couldn't feel anything. It was kind of hard to believe that she really had a heart like the one on the poster in her classroom.

"Okaaaaaay—stop!"

"My heart beat ninety times," Bree said.

"I think I got eighty-nine," Nancy said.

Robert got eighty-seven. Olivia got ninety-three.

"Me too," said Nola.

"Ha! My heart beat the fastest!" Grace shouted. "I got ninety-seven."

"This wasn't a race, Grace," Mr. Dudeny said. "And nobody's heart beats at the same rate all the time." Then he

#### turned to Clara. "Is something the matter?"



"My heart only beat seven times!" she said.

Lionel jumped up. "Call an ambulance! This is a medical emergency!"

"Dude, sit down and stop acting silly."

Just then the bell rang. Everybody grabbed their backpacks and headed for the door. Everybody except Clara. "Bye, Mr. Dude. See you Monday," Nancy called.

Mr. Dude waved. He was standing over Clara's desk. Nancy heard him saying, "Don't be upset. You are *not* having a heart attack. Your heart is strong and healthy." Then he took Clara's fingers and helped her take her pulse again.

Mr. Dude was the best teacher ever. Not only was he smart and funny, he was nice, too. No, he was much better than nice: He was kindhearted!

As she walked home with Bree, Nancy thought more about that word—"kindhearted."



"We say people are kindhearted. But a heart can't really be kind, can it?" she asked.

"I guess not." Bree was busy sucking on a grape Ring Pop.

"And we call mean people heartless," Nancy went on. "Like they don't have a heart. But everybody has one."

Bree nodded. Nancy could tell that she wasn't really interested. To Nancy, however, it was important. If the heart was just some muscle, like Mr. Dudeny said, then what made people fall in love?





Andy arrived soon after Nancy got home. He high-fived her, then slung his guitar off his shoulder and tossed his Red Sox cap on the couch. He wore his baseball cap everywhere. Nancy thought he looked much cuter without it.

This was Nancy's sixth guitar lesson. Andy was teaching her an old rock song. It was called "Wild Thing."

"What's up, JoJo?" he asked Nancy's little sister. Only the way he said it was like this: "Wazzup." That was how teenagers talked. Then Andy picked JoJo up and twirled her around and around. It looked like she was flying.

"Again!" JoJo said.

Nancy's mom came in. "Oh, no, missy! We have to leave Andy and Nancy alone."

"So?" Andy asked as he handed JoJo over to Mom. "Has my best student been practicing?"

Nancy giggled. Of course she was Andy's best student. She was Andy's *only* student. Her mom had answered an ad

he had put up on the bulletin board at the supermarket.



Nancy snapped open her guitar case. Her guitar was turquoise with little tuning knobs made of imitation ivory. It was Nancy's most prized possession. Holding the guitar neck with her left hand, Nancy began strumming with her pick. It was imitation ivory too. As she did, she switched chords from A to D to E major and back to A.

"Yesss! What I'm hearing is rock . . . and . . . roll!" Andy strapped on his guitar and started playing along with Nancy.

"Wild thing!" Andy sang. "You make my heart sing! You make everything . . ." Andy looked over at Nancy.

"Groovy!" She sang in a low, growly voice the way Andy did.

For the next forty-five minutes Nancy kept playing. Andy showed her how to play a G chord and a C chord. Andy was a superb guitar player. And he was almost a celebrity. His band played at sweet-sixteen parties and bar mitzvahs.



"You were totally rockin' the joint today!" he told her afterward. "With the five chords you know now, you can play lots of songs."



They were drinking lemonade in the kitchen. JoJo was sitting on Andy's lap. She was holding his glass.

"Andy, what are you doing for Valentine's Day?" Nancy asked.

Andy shrugged. "No plans." Then he turned to JoJo and shouted, "More lemonade!"

JoJo shook her head no.

"I want lemonade! Now!" It was a game JoJo had made up. Andy had to act like a bratty little kid. He had to remember to say please before JoJo gave him lemonade. It was a dumb game. But JoJo thought it was hilarious.

"I think you should serenade your girlfriend outside her window." Serenade meant singing love songs to someone. It was very romantic.

"What girlfriend?" Andy asked.

"Margaret! Your girlfriend, Margaret. Remember?" Nancy had asked a million questions about Margaret. Andy's girlfriend had long brown hair, green eyes, and was almost seventeen.

"Oh, we broke up," Andy said. He didn't sound upset. But Nancy was.

"Why?"

"She said we didn't spend enough time together. I thought we spent way too much time together."

Nancy thought about that. "Margaret wasn't the right girl for you," she said with certainty. She finished her lemonade. "When you find that special someone, you'll never want to part."

"If you say so." Andy put JoJo down. He went and got his baseball cap and his guitar. "So? Next week, same time, same place!"

Nancy waved as he drove off in his pickup truck. She hoped Andy found the love of his life soon. Valentine's Day was only a week away!







n Saturday night, as soon as Bree's little brother, Freddy, was asleep, Nancy and Bree had Annie all to themselves.

Annie was the best babysitter in the universe. Annie let Nancy and Bree style her hair. (It was so long she could sit on it!) Annie gave almost perfect manicures—the polish never smooshed! —and Annie knew all the words to loads of songs.

Right now they were all dancing to a hip-hop song. Annie had awesome moves.

"Ooh! That was superb!" Nancy said. "Do it again!"

Annie spun around, stopped short, and did a hop and a kick while her arms moved up and down like a robot's.

When the song was over, they all collapsed on the sofa. Nancy was perspiring. "Perspiring" sounded more grown-up than "sweating." She was also breathing hard.

"I bet my heart is beating five hundred times a minute!" Nancy said.



"No. That's impossible," Bree said. Then she told Annie what they had learned about the heart. "Hummingbirds' hearts beat about a thousand times a minute. But not human-being hearts."

"I don't think that Nancy was being literal," Annie said to Bree. She explained that literal meant sticking to facts. That was another great thing about Annie. She knew a ton of fancy words.



At nine thirty, Annie said, "It's your bedtime. And I have to start studying for my French test."

Bree pooched out her lips. "But we didn't get to look through your fashion magazines."

"Okay, we can. But after your teeth are brushed and you're both in your pj's."

"Deal!" Nancy and Bree said together.

A few minutes later, the trundle under Bree's bed had been pulled out. Annie sat between Bree and Nancy. Slowly, they leafed through every page of *Glamour Girl*, deciding which outfits were chic. Annie said chic was French for cool. Annie said it like this: "sheek."

On page 156 was a quiz: "Is Your Boyfriend Right for You?" There was a photo of a girl staring at a boy. Over his head was a big question mark.



"Ooh! Can we give you the quiz?" Bree asked. "Then you'll know if Dan is right for you." Dan was Annie's boyfriend.

"I don't need to take the quiz. I already know the answer," Annie said.



"Oh, that's so romantic!" Nancy clasped her hands together. "You're madly in love with Dan!"

But Annie was shaking her head. "No. That's not what I meant. Dan and I broke up. He definitely wasn't right for me."

"What went wrong?" Bree asked. "You loved his dimples and his laugh. Remember?"

"Yeah, I guess." Annie closed the magazine. "Maybe the problem was that he was too nice."

Being nice was a problem? Nancy said, "I don't understand."

Annie shut the magazine. "Oh, whatever I wanted to do was always fine with him. Whatever I said, he agreed with. It got boring."

Then Annie climbed over Nancy and blew the girls a kiss. As she turned off the light she said, "I have a date with my French book. So *bonne nuit!*"

In French that meant good night. Annie said it like this: "bun new-wee."

"I wish Annie had a real date tonight," Nancy whispered in the dark.

"Then she couldn't have come to babysit," Bree pointed out.

Yes. That was true. But Bree was being too—what was that word Annie had used? Too literal.





The next morning, Bree and Nancy were in their clubhouse. It was in Nancy's backyard. They had allowed JoJo and Freddy to come too.

The sign outside said SLEUTH HEADQUARTERS. A sleuth was a detective. And both Nancy and Bree were superb sleuths. The file for their first case was inside a bright pink folder. It told all about catching the thief who had stolen Mr. Dudeny's big blue marble.



Nancy had bought a package of pink folders for all the cases they were going to solve. However, the other folders were still empty. Nobody seemed to be committing crimes lately. So Nancy and Bree were at Sleuth Headquarters doing homework.

Doing homework was Bree's idea. Nancy didn't see the point. Their Appreciation Hearts didn't have to be handed in until Friday.

Mr. Dudeny thought that third graders were too grown-up—"mature" was what he said—to give Valentine's Day cards to one another. Instead, everyone was making Appreciation Hearts. Appreciating someone meant liking them.



"Dudes, think of a reason why you appreciate each person in 3D," Mr. Dude had said. Then he passed out envelopes.

Inside each were lots of paper hearts, along with a list of the kids in the class.

"What about kids we don't like? Can we say why we unappreciate them?" Grace asked.

"I won't bother answering that question," was all Mr. Dudeny said.

Grace. Finding something good to say about Grace was going to be a challenge. That meant it was going to be very, very, very, very hard. Nancy lay on her back, staring up at the butterfly mobile in the clubhouse. No matter how hard she blew, it didn't move.



Already Bree had a stack of hearts finished. Nancy had only done two. For Yoko, she had written, *I appreciate Yoko* 

because she taught me cat's cradle. For Lionel she had written, I appreciate Lionel because he is humorous and artistic.



"This heart is for Andy." JoJo held up a scribble. "I love Andy." JoJo said she was going to make a heart for everybody she loved.

"Me too." Freddy put down the space guy he had been playing with. "One for Mama, one for Daddy, one for Nana." He went on making scribble hearts. "And one for Annie. When I go to bed, Annie sings to me," he told JoJo. "I love her."

All at once, Nancy sat up. She could feel an idea taking root in her mind. Andy didn't have a girlfriend. Annie didn't have a boyfriend. "Bree!" she said excitedly.

Bree didn't answer. She was checking over the class list. "Mmmm. Let's see. Whose name is next?"

Andy and Annie. Their names went together like two puzzle pieces.

Annie and Andy. It sounded like the title of a song!

Ooh la la! Nancy's idea kept growing. She could almost feel it blooming into a flower. Not just any flower, but a beautiful red rose for Valentine's Day.





**B** ree, stop doing homework and listen to me. Let's make Andy and Annie fall in love!"

Bree frowned as she let Nancy's words sink in. For a moment Nancy was worried. Maybe Bree thought this was a crazy idea. But a second later, Bree sprang from the beanbag chair. She started shouting, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" and doing the little dance she did whenever she made a soccer goal. "That's the best idea ever!"

Nancy smiled modestly and said *merci*. "You think we can make them fall in love before Valentine's Day?" she asked once Bree calmed down.

"Or what about right on Valentine's Day!"

"Ooh. That's way better," Nancy said.

Bree had a dreamy look on her face. "Years from now, Annie and Andy will tell their kids about meeting on Valentine's Day. How they fell in love the minute they gazed into each other's eyes."

"Andy and Annie. Don't you love saying it?" Nancy imagined double hearts with their names written in swirly letters.



"So?" Bree flopped back down in the beanbag chair. "How will we get them to meet?"

Nancy frowned. "I haven't exactly worked that part out yet."

"We need a plan."

"Yes!" Nancy said. "We can call it Operation Eternal Love." Eternal love meant loving someone forever, to infinity.

"Fine." Bree bit her lower lip. "What if I call Annie, or you could call Andy and say, 'Guess what! I know the perfect person for you. You're definitely going to fall in love. So call this number . . . "Bree stopped. "No, that'll never work."

"Yeah, Andy's not going to call some girl because I said so. We need to arrange for them to meet someplace," Nancy said. "Only they can't know we're behind it." Bree wrinkled her nose. "That's going to be hard."

"We'll think of something," Nancy assured her. Then she got the package of pink folders, and on the front of one she wrote *Operation Eternal Love* in big purple letters.



Sure enough, that very afternoon Nancy stumbled upon a plan.

Nancy was helping Dad with the grocery shopping. Before getting in line to check out, they stopped at the greeting card aisle. Her dad needed to pick out some Valentine's Day cards.



"Hey! This is a good one to give Mom!" He showed Nancy a card. There was a photo of a gorilla in a top hat and it said "I go ape for you!"

"No, Dad! All wrong! Nothing humorous!"

Instead Nancy found a card with a puffy red satin heart on the front. It said "For my beloved wife, my heart belongs to you and only you." Then her eyes fell on another card. Ooh la la! The card was silver, and in silver glitter it said "From your secret admirer." Inside was a love poem.



"Get this one, Dad."



On the way home, Nancy asked, "What exactly is a secret admirer, Dad?"

"Hmmm. How can I explain it? It's when you love somebody but you don't tell them. Not right away. Instead, you leave presents—like flowers or poems—and write 'This is from your secret admirer."

That was just about the most romantic thing Nancy had ever heard!

"Were you Mom's secret admirer?" Nancy asked at home, while they were putting away groceries. "Did you worship her from afar?"

Her mom came into the kitchen and heard Nancy.

"Worship me from afar?" Mom looked at Dad and laughed. "No, sweetie. Your father didn't know I existed, even though he sat right next to me in a history class."

"Is that true, Dad?"

"If your mother says so."

Mom helped put away cartons of ice cream and packages of meat. "Then right before exam time, suddenly Dad started to notice me."

"Ooh la la! He realized you were the girl of his dreams!"

Mom shut the freezer door. "He realized he needed help studying. Serious help."

"Were you a bad student, Dad?"

"Uh, I was more what you might call a student of life."

Nancy turned from her dad to her mom. "What does that mean?"

Nancy's mother was smiling. "It means that in college your father never missed a party and spent way too much time playing Hacky Sack."

"Team captain," her dad said proudly. "Undefeated our final season. Let's not forget that!"

"Thanks to me, you passed that history exam."

"And the rest is history!" Dad said. He wrapped his arms around Nancy's mom and kissed her. "I never looked at another girl!"



Nancy went upstairs to her room, flopped on her bed, and pondered. Yes, her parents had found true love. But it wasn't a very romantic story. It would have been so much better if her dad had been secretly admiring her mother and then finally declared his love.

That was definitely the way Annie and Andy had to fall in love, Nancy decided. There was only one problem. How could Andy be Annie's secret admirer when he didn't even know her?





**B** ree came up with the answer during recess on Monday. It was while she was hanging upside down on the jungle gym. Bree claimed to do her best thinking upside down. "All the blood from my heart goes straight to my brain," she said, "and makes it work better."

That didn't sound scientific. But maybe it was true. Because Bree's plan was superb. She swung right side up and explained it to Nancy.

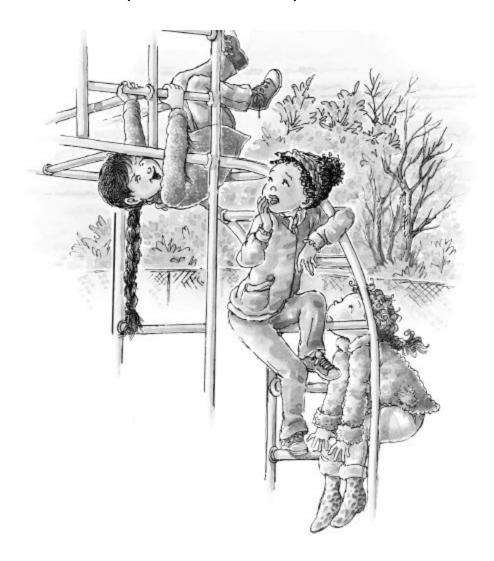
"Every day we'll leave something for Annie at her front door. Like candy. Or a rose. And each time the note will say 'From your secret admirer."

Nancy was straddling a bar on the jungle gym. Hanging upside down didn't make her any smarter. It just made her dizzy. "Oh! So we're pretending to be Andy!"

"Who's Andy?" Grace asked. She was swinging from a rung above Bree and Nancy.

"This is a private conversation," Bree informed Grace.

Nancy inched closer to Bree. "Let's leave a poem for Annie, too. A love poem!" she whispered.



Grace climbed down a rung. "Have you done an Appreciation Heart about me yet?"

"No," Bree said.

Nancy just shook her head. She'd finished a couple more hearts last night. But she still had a lot to go.

"I did both of yours." Then in a singsong voice, Grace said, "Want me to tell what I wrote?"

Secretly Nancy did. But right away, Bree shook her head. "No. Mr. D said it's supposed to be a surprise." Bree was much stricter about rules than Nancy.

A moment later, Mr. Dudeny called out that recess was over. That meant that Bree and Nancy had to wait until lunchtime to plan out more of Operation Eternal Love.

Bree and Nancy sat at their usual table under a poster about the four food groups.



"What if we drop clues for Annie?" Bree said as she unfolded a napkin and spread it carefully on top of her tray.

"Clues?" Nancy watched Bree arrange her sandwich, milk box, apple slices, and bag of trail mix on the tray. Bree was very neat about lunch.



"Like in the first love note we say, 'My first name starts with an 'A,' just like yours," Bree explained. "It'll make it even more mysterious."

"Oh!" This was such a superb idea. Nancy wished she had thought of it herself. "And in another one, we say, 'I play guitar. Soon I will serenade you, my darling!"

Bree giggled. "That's really good!"

Yoko and Clara came and sat at their table.

"Let's tell them! Please, please!" Nancy begged Bree. Operation Eternal Love was too good to keep just to themselves.

"Tell us what?" Clara asked.

As soon as Clara and Yoko locked their lips and threw away the key, Nancy said, "We're going to make two teenagers fall in love!"

"Wow! It's like something out of a movie!" Yoko said once she heard their plan.

"I know!" said Nancy. It was like a movie. In the last scene, Annie and Andy would be walking down a street holding hands. . . . No, no. They wouldn't be on a street. They'd be on a beach holding hands. At sunset. Then suddenly the words "The End" would pop up over their heads.

"I don't understand." Clara had pulled apart an Oreo cookie and was licking off the filling. "How can they fall in love if they don't know each other?"



"Simple." Nancy held up the granola bar in her lunch box to see if anybody wanted it. Nobody did. "They are going to meet on Valentine's Day."

"How?" Clara wanted to know. "Where?"

"Um, we're still planning that part," Bree said.

"You only have till Friday," Yoko pointed out.

That was true. Time was of the essence. That was something Mr. Dudeny often said. It meant there wasn't a minute to waste.

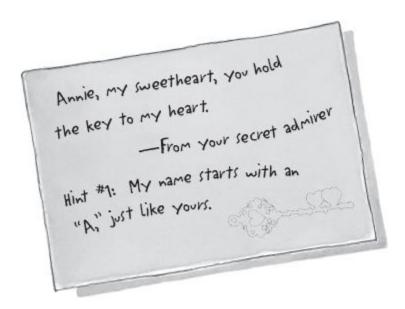
After school, Nancy and Bree set Operation Eternal Love into motion. They rode over to Annie's house. No car was in the driveway. And nobody was out walking a dog.

"It looks like the coast is clear!" Nancy said. A shiver of excitement wiggled through her. This was almost like sleuthing! They parked their bikes a few houses down from Annie's. Then Nancy grabbed the love note and the granola bar from her bike basket. Nancy wished they had a fancy box of candy, the kind where each piece sat in a little pleated paper cup. But Bree kept insisting, "It's the thought that counts."

Lickety-split they dashed down to Annie's house. As they reached the porch, a dog inside started yapping like mad. They left the note and granola bar right by the front door. Then they made a quick getaway.



On the ride back home, Nancy imagined the look on Annie's face when she read the note. It was written on a rose-pink index card and said:



At the bottom, in silver gel-pen ink, Nancy had drawn a fancy key. Bree had written all the words because her script looked more grown-up than Nancy's.

As Nancy turned the corner onto their street, she was filled with a sense of satisfaction. Andy and Annie were one step closer to falling in love!





**S** tep two did not go as smoothly. First it started pouring almost the minute school let out. Nancy and Bree had to run the whole way home.

Nancy was out of breath by the time they reached Bree's house. She flung herself on the sofa, panting.

Bree pointed to a vase on the hall table. "There are the roses."

"Oh." Nancy was disappointed. "They look so droopy."

"What do you expect? My mom's birthday was last week." Nancy went over and picked out the ones that still had most of their petals.



"I don't know," Bree said, watching Nancy. "Mom might get mad."

"Don't be silly." Nancy tied her hair ribbon around the roses. "Your mom has plenty left. They're going to get tossed soon anyway."

"I guess." Bree didn't look convinced.

Then Nancy raced home and brought back the Valentine's Day card that her dad had bought. "Here. Read this," she said, handing Bree the silver secret admirer card.

Bree read it aloud:

"No other eyes shine like your eyes.
They sparkle like stars in the night skies.
And your smile is like the morning sun,
Spreading warmth on everyone.
It's you I'm always thinking of.
To you I pledge eternal love."

"Doesn't that say it all?" Nancy smiled and sighed. "I'll get a pink index card so you can write it down."

"Oh, no! No way!" Bree shoved the card back at Nancy. "That's copying!"

Nancy sighed. "Okay, okay."



Together they came up with another love poem.

Roses are red, Violets are blue. My eternal love is all Pledged to you.

"This isn't nearly as good," Nancy grumbled.

Bree said exactly what Nancy knew she would say: "It's the thought that counts."

Nancy returned Dad's valentine, then got her raincoat, helmet, and bike. Biking to Annie's in the rain was no fun. By the time they got there, Bree and Nancy were soaking wet.

Once again, the house looked deserted, which meant nobody was home.

They ran up the porch steps.



Once again, the dog started yipping.

"Aw, some of the ink ran," Bree said as they put the card and flowers on the mat by the front door. "It looks like it says 'For Amie."

The roses had also lost more petals.

"Nancy? Nancy Clancy?" they suddenly heard someone shouting.

Nancy and Bree spun around.

A truck had pulled to a stop right in front of Annie's house. It was Andy's old pickup truck. Inside it was Andy!





ey!" Andy rolled down the window. "I thought it was you!"

Nancy's brain froze. She gulped. "H-hi, Andy!"

"That's Andy?" Bree whispered. When Nancy nodded, Bree let out a squeak like a mouse. "What do we say?"

Nancy didn't know. Her brain was still frozen.

"What are you doing over here?" Andy asked. Then he pointed to their bikes. "Those yours?"

"Um, yeah. We were—uh, we were riding our bikes." Nancy licked her lips and blinked. "Then it started raining really hard. So . . . so we ducked under this porch for a minute." The words just seemed to pop out of her mouth all on their own. But they made sense. Kind of. "I have no idea who lives here," she added.

"Come on. I'll give you girls a ride home."

Oh no! Andy was getting out of the truck. What if Annie came home now? It would mess up everything!

Andy picked up both bikes and put them in the back of the truck. Nancy and Bree scrambled into the front seat. Nancy peered down the street. So far, there was no sign of Annie.

Before Andy started the engine, he turned to Nancy. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?"

"Sorry. This is Bree," Nancy said hurriedly.

"Hi." Bree smiled a nervous smile. Too many of her teeth were showing.



"Okay, away we go." Andy took out his key and started the engine. At least, he tried to. Each time, the truck made a funny noise.



"This happens all the time," he said. "It'll just take a second to fix. Don't look so worried, Nancy."

Worried? Nancy wasn't worried. She was frazzled. She was frantic! She was panic-stricken! Everything was going wrong! While Andy got under the hood of his truck, Nancy and Bree scrunched way down in front so maybe Annie wouldn't see them if she came by.

Hurry, Andy. Hurry, Andy! Nancy was shouting in her head. Nancy was almost 100 percent positive that she and Bree could send thoughts to each other. But they were best friends. Andy was only her guitar teacher.

At last Andy returned and—ooh la la!—this time the engine sprang to life. The truck took off down the street. At the corner, a red station wagon was waiting to make a turn.

"That's Annie's car!" Bree whispered to Nancy.

They had gotten away in the nick of time!

"Merci beaucoup!" Nancy said to Andy when they reached her house. She and Bree hopped down from the truck. "See you Friday. Same time. Same place."

"'Fraid not," Andy said as he got their bikes down. "I need to call your mom. I got a gig late Friday afternoon." Andy was going to play guitar at the Candy Café for some little kid's birthday party.

"Oh! JoJo's going to that party!" Nancy exclaimed.

"So is Freddy—he's my little brother," Bree added.

"Maybe we can switch your guitar lesson to Saturday." Andy got back in the truck, tipped his baseball cap to Bree and Nancy, and drove off.

"Talk about a close call!" Nancy said once Andy's truck was out of sight.

Bree's hand was pressed against her chest. "My heart is pounding so hard. I have to sit down."

In the kitchen, Nancy poured two big glasses of apple juice. While she gulped hers down, Nancy thought about what Andy had just told them. "Bree, maybe running into Andy was a stroke of luck."

"It was?"

"Think about it!" Nancy paused. "Now we know where Andy and Annie can meet Friday!"



A smile began to break out on Bree's face. She jumped up and started doing her little victory dance. "Yessss! The Candy Café!"

The birthday party invitation was on the fridge. The party ended at five o'clock.

"They always have cake at the end," Bree said. "Andy's gig will be over right before then."

Nancy nodded. "So around a quarter to five is when Annie has to show up. Oh, Bree, this is all working out!"

Bree said, "We can go to the Candy Café when it's time to pick up JoJo and Freddy." A dreamy look came over her face. "We can spy on Annie and Andy and watch them fall in love!"



Nancy poured herself more juice. "Maybe it wasn't just luck that Andy drove by!" she said, squinting her eyes in deep thought. "Of all the streets in town, why did Andy pick Annie's street to drive down? Maybe he was drawn to her house like a magnet."

"Ooooh." Bree sat back and let this sink in. "It's like their love is meant to be!"

"Exactly!" Then Nancy clinked her glass against Bree's and they both said at the same time, "To eternal love!"





On Wednesday, the letter that Nancy and Bree left on Annie's porch said:

My darling,

I cannot keep my eternal love a secret any longer. Please meet me on Friday at the Candy Café. Be there at twilight. (That is 4:45.) I am tall, dark, and handsome. I will be wearing a Red Sox baseball cap.

Check one of the boxes below:

- YES, I will be there.
- NO, I am not coming.

Leave your answer at the bench by the swings at the playground.

P.S. Maybe use some tape so it won't blow away.

Thursday was the longest school day ever. Nancy couldn't wait until three o'clock when she and Bree could bike to the playground. What if Annie's answer was no? Then all their

hard work would have been a waste. It was too heartbreaking to think about!

Even during creative writing, Nancy's mind kept wandering. All she did was fill her paper with doodles. Little hearts. Big hearts. Hearts with frills around the edges. Inside each one were two script "A"s.

"Daydreaming, Nancy?"

Nancy looked up. "Yes. Sorry, Mr. D."

"I'm eager to find out what Lucette is up to next."

Lucette Fromage was a nine-year-old girl that Nancy had made up. In the last story, Lucette Fromage had caught a gang of jewel thieves. Now Lucette was trying to reunite a prince and the poor village girl he loved. One reason why Mr. D liked Nancy's stories was that she used vivid, interesting words, like "reunite," which meant get back together.



Mr. Dude said, "Sometimes a writer needs to daydream. Writers can get superb ideas from daydreaming."

Nancy smiled. She loved Mr. D so much. Not in an eternallove kind of way. But because he was so wise and understanding.

At last, the minute hand crept up to the twelve and the hour hand reached the three. The bell on the wall in their classroom rang.



School was out!

Nancy and Bree jumped from their seats, raced down the hall, and burst outside. While they were stashing stuff in their bike baskets, Grace came over to them.

"Bree, your mom is parked around the corner. She told me to tell you that she's driving you and Nancy home."



"What?!" Bree and Nancy cried. "Why?" Grace shrugged. "How should I know?"

Bree turned to Nancy. "This ruins everything."

"Ruins what?" Grace asked eagerly. "Ruins what?" she repeated, tagging along as they wheeled their bikes over to Bree's mother's car.

"Why can't we bike home?" Bree asked her mom. "We don't need you to drive us."

It turned out that Nancy's mom was working late. Bree's mom was picking up JoJo and Freddy from preschool and then doing some errands. "I don't want you girls staying in the house alone. I've got the trunk open. Put your bikes in back and jump in." Bree's mom had a "don't argue" look on her face. Still, Bree gave it a try.

"We have to bike over to the playground," Bree said. "It's very important. Pleeeeeeeease." She strung the word out forever.

It didn't work.

"What's so important?" Grace wanted to know. "Why do you have to go to the playground?"

"None of . . ." Nancy was starting to say "None of your beeswax." Then she remembered something. Grace lived across the street from the playground.

"Grace, will you do something for us?" Nancy asked.

"Maybe. But not for free. You'll have to pay me back. Deal?"

Nancy rolled her eyes, then nodded. "Deal."

"Nancy, hurry up," Bree's mother called. Bree was already in the backseat, pouting.

Quickly Nancy told Grace what she had to do.

"Call right after!" Nancy said as she buckled up the seat belt. "I'll be at Bree's."





every time the phone rang, Nancy and Bree jumped.

At last Bree's mom said, "Bree, Nancy. It's Grace on the phone."

Bree got right down to business. "Did you find the note, Grace?"

"Yes."

"Well, does it say yes or no?" Nancy asked. It was hard sharing one phone.

"First you have to tell me what going's on."

Nancy groaned. So did Bree. But they told Grace.

"That's, like, the stupidest thing I've ever heard," Grace told them.

Nancy was about to say there was no such word as "stupidest." Instead she shouted, "Just tell us what Annie said!"

"She said no, she isn't coming!"

Bree and Nancy looked at each other. Nancy's lips trembled. Bree already had tears in her eyes.

"Ha! I'm only kidding!" Grace was laughing into the phone. "The box for yes is checked."

"You'd better not be kidding this time, Grace!" Bree said.

"I'll bring it to school tomorrow. You can see for yourself. And here's what you have to do to pay me back."

A minute later they hung up.

Nancy was thrilled. Andy and Annie were meeting tomorrow! It wasn't just a plan anymore. It was really happening. She didn't even mind having Grace sit at their table at lunch for two weeks. Well, she minded, but it was worth it.



At home later, Nancy practiced playing guitar. Then she finished up the last of her Appreciation Hearts. They had to be handed in tomorrow. She did Nola's and Richard's and Isabel's. In a little while there were checks by everyone's names on the class list. Everyone except Grace's. Nancy felt bad that it was so hard to find a reason to like Grace.

"Nancy. The phone is for you," Nancy heard her mom calling.

When she picked it up, she heard Grace's voice.

"Uh, Nancy? Listen, you and Bree don't have to pay me back. The favor is for free."

What? Nancy almost asked Grace why she was being nice. Instead, she said, "*Merci*, Grace. I truly appreciate it and—and look. I guess you can still sit with us."

Nancy got off the phone. Suddenly she knew exactly what to write on Grace's heart: *I appreciate Grace because she did a favor for me.* Then Nancy put extra glitter on Grace's heart.



Just then, the bell on the Top-Secret Special Delivery mailbox started ringing. That meant Bree was sending a message. The basket hung from a rope between their bedroom windows.

Nancy reached for the note. It was not written in code. That had to mean Bree was in a super rush to get in touch.

When she read it, Nancy understood.

The note in the basket said "Annie's baby-sitting. Come over toute de suite!" Toute de suite meant right away in

French. You say it like this: "toot-deh-sweet."

Since all of Nancy's homework was done, her mom said okay.

"Guess what! Annie has a secret admirer!" Bree said the second Nancy walked in the door. Bree was hopping all around and acting excited. "Wait till you hear!"

Nancy had never realized what a good actress Bree was. So Nancy tried to act really surprised too. "A secret admirer? Wow!" Nancy let her jaw drop open.

Annie was helping Freddy build a Lego rocket ship. "Yes! I'm meeting him tomorrow. At the Candy Café."



"Do you have any idea who it is?" Nancy asked Annie.

"Not really. He's tall, dark, and handsome and plays guitar."

"He left flowers for Annie. Roses!" Bree really sounded as if this were news to her.

"Ooh la la! That's so romantic. What did the love poem say?"

Annie looked up from the floor. "Who said anything about a love poem?"

Whoopsy! Bad slip! "Um—it's like a rule," Nancy stammered. "Secret admirers always leave a love poem."

Quickly Bree switched the subject. "Annie, how will you wear your hair tomorrow?" Then, when Annie took Freddy up to bed, Bree glared and said, "I can't believe it. You nearly blew the whole thing!"

"I'm so sorry! It just slipped out. You think she suspects?"

"No. But watch what you say!" Bree glanced at the stairs. "Shh. I hear Annie coming."

Freddy was asleep, so Bree and Nancy had Annie all to themselves now. First they took turns brushing Annie's long hair until it looked super shiny.

Then they tried out different shades of eye shadow on Annie. And different lip glosses. And different hairstyles.





They also gave her a super-deluxe facial.

"Ummmmm. I feel like I'm at a beauty spa." Annie said.

"Ooh la la. Your skin—I mean your complexion—looks as smooth as velvet now," Nancy said after they wiped the gook off her face.

"I'd better not get a zit before twilight tomorrow!" Annie said just as Bree's parents returned home. "Wish me bonne chance." Annie said it like this: "bun shahnss." "That's French for good luck!"

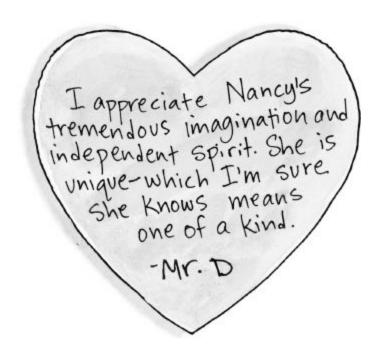




Priday Mr. D brought in cupcakes.
 Everyone read their Appreciation Hearts. Nancy got five nices and twelve fancys.

The one Grace made for Nancy said *I appreciate Nancy because she is not boring.* Nancy read it a couple of times. Was this a compliment? Did it mean Grace thought she was interesting?

The most special ones came from Mr. Dudeny and, of course, Bree.



After the last bell rang, Clara invited Yoko, Nancy, and Bree to her house. But Nancy explained why they had to decline. "At twilight Annie and Andy are meeting at the Candy Café."

"We're going to spy on them and watch them fall in love," Bree added.

"Oh, please, can we come too?" Clara begged. Nancy was ready to say yes. But Bree was firm. "Sorry. It'd be too risky with four people. Nancy and I have to stay undercover."

Bree had worked out a minute-by-minute schedule.

4:40 Arrive at Candy Café.

4:41 Go next door to Belle's Fashion Boutique.

4:42 Sneak into alleyway between Belle's and Candy Café. Spy through window.

4:43 Wait for Annie to arrive.

4:45-5:00 Watch Annie and Andy fall in love.

At 4:40, right on time, Nancy's mother pulled into the parking lot behind the Candy Café.

"Can Bree and I go over to Belle's?"
Nancy's mom looked ready to say no.

"Please, oh please, Mom!" Nancy said. "It's right next door. It's not even twilight yet."

Nancy's mom relented.

At Belle's, Bree and Nancy didn't even stop to check out the jewelry counter. They went straight to the back entrance and ducked into the alley between the two stores.

The Candy Café window was higher than they'd expected. They had to stand on their tippy toes. From the party room, Nancy could hear lots of little kids singing "Happy Birthday" to guitar music.



"Andy's gig is over now!" Nancy whispered excitedly.

Sure enough, a minute later Andy sat down at a table in the main room. A waitress took his order.

"Perfect! A table for two!" Bree squealed softly.

Now only one thing was missing.

Annie!

At 4:45 on the dot, she arrived. Annie was wearing everything they'd told her to, and she looked stunning, ravishing, breathtaking!

For a moment Annie glanced around the room. Then she spotted Andy. Andy spotted Annie. They waved to each other.



"She's sitting down at the table! Bree, we did it. It's all coming true!"

Bree's hand was cupped over her mouth. She was speechless.

"Come on. Let's go in and say hi!" Nancy started tugging Bree by the arm.

Bree looked uncertain. "Ooh, I want to. But won't that give it away?"

"We came with my mom to pick up JoJo and Freddy. Remember? It would be rude not to say hi."

"You're right," Bree said. "But don't let anything slip like before."



At the Candy Café in the party room, JoJo and Freddy and lots of other little kids were racing around tooting party horns. Nancy's mom was sharing a piece of cake with another mom. She saw Nancy and Bree and waved.

At a table in the back, there they were—Annie and Andy. Andy and Annie. They each were holding a spoon. In between them was a banana split. Annie was laughing at something Andy said.

It was like a movie, only better—this was real life!

Bree and Nancy went over and said hi at the same time. It came out too loud.

Andy looked up, startled. Annie swiveled around and said, "Oh! Hi, Bree. Hi, Nancy."

Andy was pointing at the banana split with his spoon. "Want to pull over chairs and help us out? This thing is huge!"



"That's very thoughtful! But we wouldn't dream of disturbing you!" Nancy said.

"You sure?" Andy asked. "We're heading to an all-dessert party later. Gotta leave some room. Right, Annie?"

Ooh la la! Annie and Andy were going to a party. Together! Tonight!

Just then, Nancy caught her mom signaling to them. JoJo and Freddy were in their coats.

"Well, got to go. See you!" Bree grabbed Nancy.

"Wait a sec." Annie stood and, wrapping an arm around Nancy and Bree, steered them to the front of the Candy Café.

"Your secret admirer is my guitar teacher! I can't believe it!" Nancy whispered. "He's tall, dark, and handsome, just like he told you!"



"And I know for a fact that Andy isn't too nice. I—I mean he's nice, but not yucky nice, like your last boyfriend," Bree babbled excitedly.

"This is meant to be," Nancy went on. "It's love eternal. You already look like you've known each other forever!"

Annie had a funny look on her face. "That's because we have known each other forever."

Bree and Nancy stopped in their tracks. "What do you mean?" they asked Annie.

"Andy and I have been buddies since ninth grade." Annie bit her lip. Then she went on. "And look, you guys. I knew you were behind the whole secret-admirer thing."

"You did? How?" Bree asked. Nancy was too shocked to utter a word.

"The writing." Annie turned to Bree. "I've watched you practice script a lot."

Nancy felt like weeping. She could see Bree did too.

"So why did you play along?" Bree asked.

Nancy was wondering the same thing.

"Because it was so sweet. You want me to find eternal love. And . . ." Annie giggled. "I was curious to see who you picked out."

Now Nancy felt silly. Annie had been playing along, the way Andy played along with JoJo's "Say please" game. To Annie, Nancy and Bree were just dumb little kids.

Then a terrible thought struck Nancy.

"Does Andy know?" she asked. If he did, she would die; she would perish! She would have to get another guitar teacher. And she would never play "Wild Thing" again. Ever.



Annie shook her head. "He thinks I just happened to show up here."

That was a relief. But Nancy was still confused. "But—but Andy said you're going to a party together. Isn't that a date?"

Annie shook her head. "Sorry. Andy and I are friends. It's strictly platonic." Then she hugged them both. "You guys are the best."

In the car on the way home, Nancy asked, "Mom, what does platonic mean?"

"Platonic? Hmmm, how can I describe it?" Mom said. "It means that—JoJo, Freddy, that's enough with the horns!" When JoJo and Freddy stopped tooting, Mom started over. "It means that you like someone as a friend but not in a romantic way."

Nancy and Bree exchanged sad looks. That was what Nancy figured platonic meant. It was the first fancy word she didn't like!

"That's how it started with Dad and me," Mom went on. "We were buddies. I helped him study. Remember? I told you that. Then one weekend we went to a party together. And—I don't know. I guess love was in the air that night."

"Oh! So you went from platonic to romantic?" As Nancy took this in, she and Bree exchanged looks again. Nancy could read Bree's mind. Just like Nancy, she was thinking that maybe this would happen to Annie and Andy. Maybe it would happen this very night!



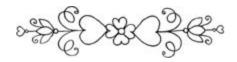
After all, it was Valentine's Day. So love was definitely in the air!



# **Credits**

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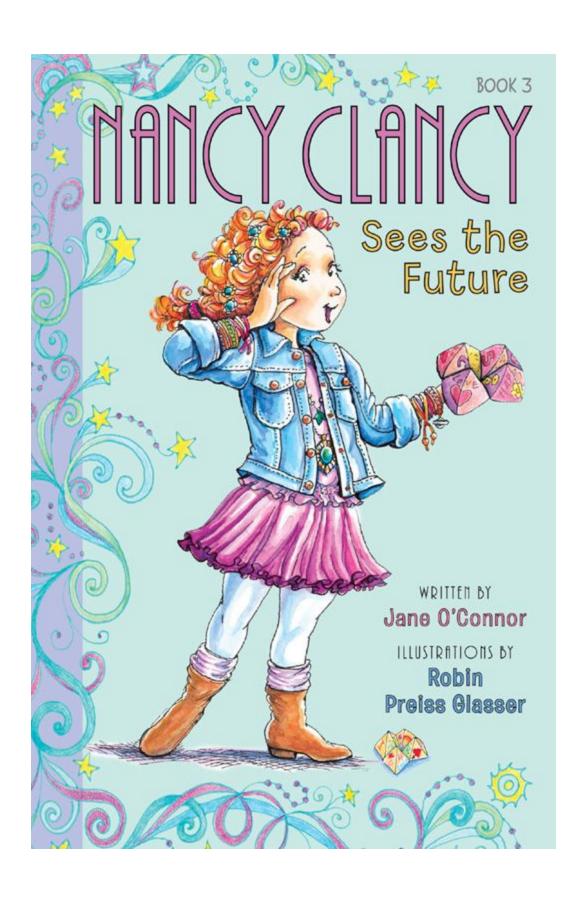
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# Sees the Future WRITTER BY Jane O'Connor ILLUSTRATIONS BY Robin Preiss Glasser

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## **Dedication**

To Kendall Messler for her invaluable help —J.O'C.

For Bob: my past, present, and future —R.P.G.



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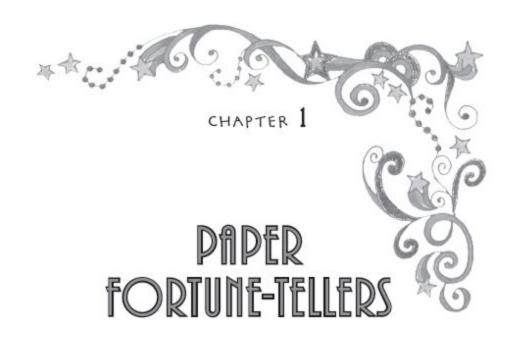
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Epilogue (Look Up the Definition!)

**Credits** 

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**M** y turn to ask a question," Nancy said to Bree.

It was late afternoon. They were in their clubhouse telling fortunes. Fortune-telling was more fun to do in the dark. So they had taped together the sheets of the clubhouse. Now the only light came from a flashlight. It kept flickering on and off because the battery was almost dead.

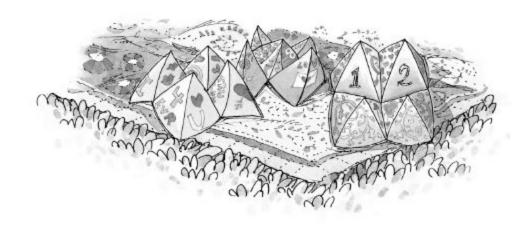
"Spooky," Bree said.

"Eerie," Nancy agreed.

Bree slipped her fingers into a paper fortune-teller. They had made so many that it looked like a flock of colorful birds had landed in the clubhouse.

In a low voice Bree whispered, "I will peer into the future now. Ask whatever you wish."

Nancy wanted to giggle. But giggling would wreck the eerie mood. So she forced her lips to unsmile. Then she asked the same thing she'd asked a bunch of times before. "Will my mom give in and let me get pierced ears before my birthday?"



"Pick a color."

"Purple," Nancy told Bree, who began opening and closing the wings of the paper fortune-teller while she spelled out P-U-R-P-L-E.

Besides Nancy, only five third-grade girls didn't have pierced ears. And that was because they were scared to. Bree's ears had been pierced when she was a baby.

"Hey! Are you paying attention?" Bree said in her normal voice. "I said to pick a number."

"Seven," Nancy said. Once Bree had opened and shut the fortune-teller seven times, Nancy got to select one of the flaps. "Mmmmm. The one with the star."

Bree cleared her throat. "The question is: Will you get your ears pierced before your birthday? The fortune-teller says . . ." Bree lifted up the paper flap and frowned. "It says, 'Unfortunately, no."

Nancy's heart sank. "It's hopeless."

Bree shrugged. "You know the answer doesn't mean anything. Fortune-telling is just pretend."

"Yes, I guess." Nancy reminded herself of all the times she'd gotten good answers to this very same question. Paper fortune-tellers were fun. But they weren't reliable. You couldn't count on them to see the future.



After Bree went home, Nancy found her mom and little sister in the kitchen. JoJo was scribbling so hard in a coloring book that the page was about to rip. Nancy's mother was searching through the freezer. "Guess I should have stopped at the supermarket after work." Her mom frowned. "Well, gang, looks like it's macaroni and cheese tonight, or—" She opened the pantry door to check there. "Or cheese and macaroni."

Just then they all heard a car crunch over the gravel in the driveway. JoJo jumped up. "It's Daddy!"

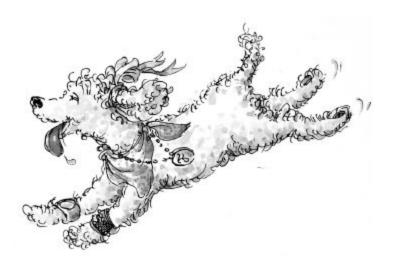
"I bet he's bringing pizza." Nancy didn't know what made her say that. The words seemed to pop out of her mouth all on their own.

Not more than a second later, the kitchen door banged open. And *voilà!* Her father was holding a large flat cardboard box from the King's Crown. Nancy was surprised. In fact, she was more than surprised. She was astonished. "Dad, I just predicted you were bringing home pizza. Didn't I, Mom?"



"Yup. She did."

Then Frenchy came racing down the stairs and ran in circles around Dad. Her tongue was hanging out and she was drooling like a maniac. That was because dogs had a superb sense of smell. Room 3D was learning about the five senses. Mr. Dudeny had explained that dogs could smell about a thousand times better than human beings.



Nancy helped her mom fix a salad. Then the Clancys all sat down in the dining room. There were candles and cloth napkins. It was one of Nancy's rules. Well, not a rule, exactly. It just made dinnertime fancy and civilized.



Nancy was on her second slice of pizza when the phone rang in the kitchen. "I have a feeling it's Grandma," Nancy said. However, she didn't get up to answer the phone. That was one of her parents' rules. No calls during dinner.



After four rings, Grandma's voice came on. "Hello, my darlings. Grandpa and I are hoping to come visit the weekend after next."

"Goody!" JoJo said, and slurped up a long string of pizza cheese.

The message ended with Grandma making a loud kissing sound. *SMOOCH!* 

"Didn't I predict it was Grandma calling?!"

"Hey. Do you have special powers we don't know about?"

"No, Dad. Of course I don't. . . . At least, I don't think I do." During dessert the phone rang again.

"So who is it this time?" Nancy's dad wanted to know.

Nancy shut her eyes, but before there was time for the answer to float into her mind, she heard Bree's voice.

"My parents are going to see somebody's new baby at the hospital. So they're taking Freddy and me over to Annie's house. It's only for an hour. Want to come?"

"Oh, please? Can I?" Nancy begged her parents. Annie was seventeen and the most superb babysitter in the world. "I've never seen Annie's room, and Bree says it's spectacular."

Nancy predicted exactly what her mom would say next: "Do you have homework?"

Everybody in 3D had to write about a special smell. Nancy's was on the little cloth bag of dead flowers that she kept in her top drawer. It was called sachet. You said it like this—"sah-shay." It made her underwear smell heavenly.



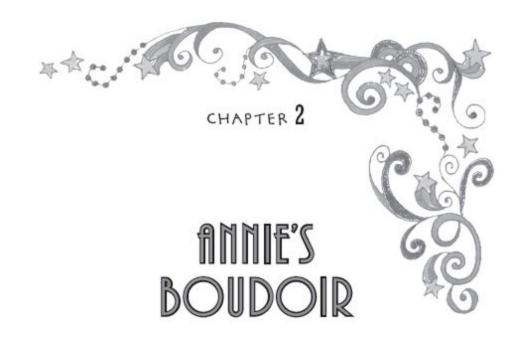
"I just have to put the finishing touches on my paragraph." That sounded better than saying she wasn't completely done.

Her mom looked uncertain.

"Mom, I'll finish it at Annie's. I promise. In fact"—Nancy raised her right hand as if she were on a witness stand—"I give you my solemn oath."

Ooh la la! That sealed the deal.





Fifteen minutes later, Bree's parents dropped off Nancy, Bree, and Bree's little brother at Annie's house. Freddy was already in his pj's. While Annie put on a video game for him in the den, Bree led Nancy down the hall.

"Ta-da!" Bree waited a beat before flinging open the door to Annie's room.

"Nancy, can you believe how cool it is?"

Nancy entered and turned around slowly. She had never been in an actual teenager's room before. Everything was built-in—the desk, the bookcases, the dresser, even the bed, which was hidden inside a wall until Bree pulled a handle. Then, *voilà!* The bed appeared, like magic. The bedspread had orange and purple stripes. Annie's rug was orange and purple too. But it had polka dots, not stripes. Double ooh la la!

"I have dibs on the window seat," Bree said. She took out this week's list of spelling words from her backpack and began testing herself. The spelling test wasn't until Thursday. Not for three whole days. But Bree had superb study skills. She always did schoolwork way ahead.

Watching Bree made Nancy remember her solemn oath. So Nancy put the finishing touches on her smell paragraph.

"Mrs. DeVine taught me how to make sachet. That's the French word for a little bag of dead flowers. You can also mix in pieces of cinnamon sticks and cloves to make the aroma even more delightful."

Done!

Bree was still spelling words out loud with her eyes closed. So Nancy took a tour of Annie's room, examining the glamorous teenage things in it. Best of all was Annie's earring tree. Hanging from its branches were tons of earrings —pearl drops, silver hoops, and clusters of purple beads that looked like bunches of grapes. There were earrings in the shape of ladybugs, ice cream cones, lightning bolts, and peace signs. Nancy imagined how superb she'd look in each and every pair.



At last Annie appeared.

"I love your boudoir," Nancy told her. "Boudoir" was French for bedroom. Nancy said it like this: "boo-dwah."

Then Annie, Nancy, and Bree all flopped down on the bed and looked through fashion magazines together.

"How come some of the pages here are ripped out?" Bree asked.

Annie pointed to her corkboard. The torn-out pages had photos of models with short hair. "Didn't I tell you? I'm getting my hair all cut off this Saturday."

"NO!" Bree and Nancy both screamed in horror. Annie's hair was perfect. It was black and shiny and so long she could sit on it. She let Nancy and Bree brush and style it any way they liked.

"It's for Locks of Love. They make wigs from real hair for kids getting treated for cancer. Often their hair falls out. My best friend and I are both doing it."

"Oh! What a thoughtful gesture!" Nancy exclaimed. Nancy's neighbor Mrs. DeVine always said that whenever Nancy did something extra nice.



"And look!" Annie's purse was on the floor. She fished around for a pink box. Inside it was a pair of earrings. They looked like little chandeliers made of rhinestones. "I bought them today. They'll look great with short hair. Now all I have to do is decide which style I like best."



Nancy took another look at the photos on the corkboard. Then she closed her eyes partway, which made her eyelids flutter.

"Why are you making that goofy face?" Bree asked.

"Shh! I need complete quiet." Nancy pressed her hands on both sides of her forehead. After a moment she said softly, "Annie, you'll get the hairstyle with bangs."



"What makes you so sure?" Bree asked.

Nancy opened her eyes. Bree was trying on Annie's chandelier earrings.

"It's a feeling I have. A strong feeling. I've been getting them all night." Then Nancy told Bree and Annie about the pizza and the call from her grandma.



Bree folded her arms across her chest. "Don't be silly. Those were lucky guesses."

It was irritating the way Bree sometimes sounded like Nancy's mother.

"Well, my—my dad thinks I may have special powers," Nancy stammered. That wasn't exactly true.

"Annie, tell her. Nobody can know stuff before it happens," Bree said.

Annie was sitting cross-legged on her bed. She shrugged. "I'm not sure. I've read about people who claim to have something called second sight. It's like a sixth sense. You know, like when you suddenly get a feeling that a long-lost friend is going to get in touch. And then it happens."

"See?" Nancy said.

Annie looked at Nancy and said slowly, "Well-I-I, I hate to bring this up. But remember when you both were soooo sure you knew exactly who I was going to fall in love with?"

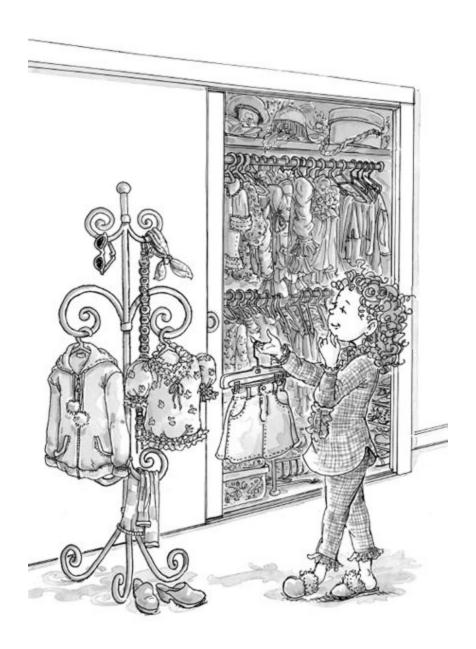
"That was a long time ago," Nancy said, embarrassed. She and Bree had tried to fix Annie up with Nancy's guitar teacher. It hadn't worked out. "My powers are very new."

"No! You don't have powers!" Bree shook her head so hard, it made the earrings swing back and forth. "And there are only five senses." She ticked them off one by one on her fingers. "Taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight. You can't have any more than that."

Nancy knew there was no point arguing. They went back to looking at Annie's fashion magazines. Nothing Nancy could say would change Bree's mind. Bree was super stubborn. There was a word for how stubborn Bree was: "obstinate."

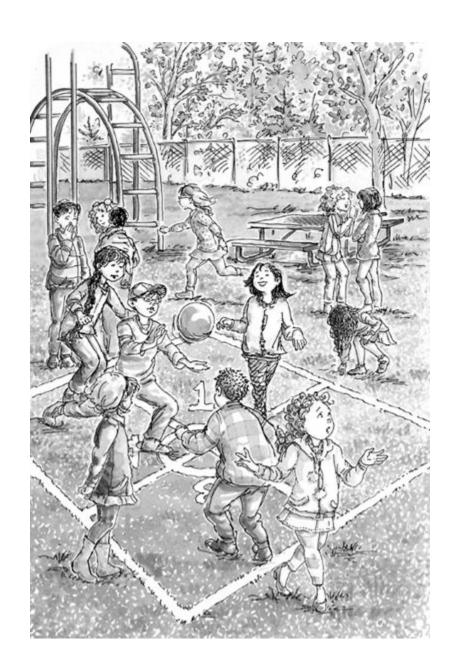
On the way home from Annie's, Nancy and Bree didn't talk much. They weren't in a fight, exactly. It was more like a disagreement.

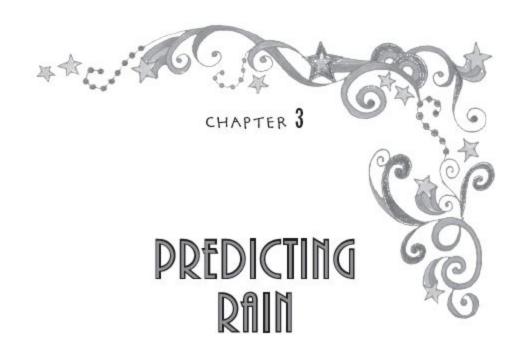
Later that night, Nancy picked out her outfit for the next day. Striped leggings. A purple hoodie. And her favorite shoes. They were glittery gold clogs and practically brandnew. But all of a sudden she started to have a funny feeling that it was going to rain tomorrow. As she thought about it, she became surer and surer. So Nancy put away the shoes and got out an old pair of ballet flats.



Then she placed a Magic Marker on her night table. It was a reminder for when she woke up. Every morning before school, she put a black dot on each earlobe for fake holes. It probably wasn't fooling anyone. Still, it made her feel better.







The next morning, Nancy and Bree walked to school together like always. Except it wasn't exactly like always. Why couldn't they just agree to disagree about Nancy's powers? That was what Mr. D suggested whenever two kids each thought the other was wrong.

At recess Bree ran off to the monkey bars. Nancy played four square with Lionel and a bunch of other kids. Then all of a sudden it began raining. At first there were just a few drops. But soon the rain started pounding down.

Everybody raced inside. They spent the rest of recess in the gym watching a movie about humpback whales. Every time it rained they watched either this movie or one about the different holidays that children around the world celebrated. It was very multicultural.

Lionel was sitting next to Nancy. He was snoring really loudly. When Mr. Dudeny came over and told him to cut it

out, Lionel blinked and acted startled. "What? Where am I? Was I asleep?"

Nancy was bored too. She listened to the hard drops of rain ping-pinging against the windows. Then, like a slap, it came back to her. Last night she had predicted it would rain. That was why she had worn an old pair of shoes. The sun had been shining all morning until ten minutes ago. She clapped a hand over her mouth and let out a squeak.

Lionel heard it and turned to her. "Hey, are you going to regurgitate?" Nancy had taught him that word. It meant throw up.



Nancy shook her head. She stared at Lionel. Lionel was her friend. He was a goofball, but he was also a talented magician. He took magic very seriously. She leaned in closer to him. "Promise you won't laugh if I tell you something weird? And promise to keep it a secret?"

"I promise."

"I think maybe I can see the future," Nancy whispered.

Lionel's eyes bugged out. "For real? That is so cool!"

On the way out of the gym, Lionel listened to all of Nancy's predictions that had come true. He kept nodding.

Right before they got to their classroom, he took out a nickel and tossed it.

"Heads or tails?"

"Tails," Nancy said.

She called the toss correctly two more times before missing. Lionel looked astonished. "Oh, you have powers, all right!"

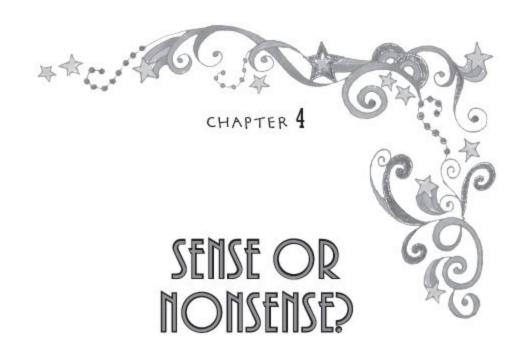


"I missed the last time," Nancy pointed out.

"That's because you're a beginner. Your powers will grow stronger!"

Hearing Lionel's words made Nancy swallow hard. So this was real! Her legs felt a little rubbery as she walked to her desk and sat down. And to think, only yesterday she had been an ordinary third grader.





**M** r. Dudeny collected everybody's smell paragraphs.

"Mine is about an undercover cop named Jimmy Aroma. He has a secret weapon—body odor," Lionel said. "He has killer BO."

"Eager to read it, dude," Mr. Dudeny said.

There was a big plastic model of a giant eyeball on his desk. The different parts came out like puzzle pieces. He explained what each part did. Afterward, for fun Mr. D passed around posters with pictures that played tricks on your eyes. "They are called optical illusions," Mr. D explained.

In one poster, Nancy sometimes saw a duck and sometimes a rabbit. In another, two dogs turned out to be exactly the same size even though one looked bigger than the other.

"Our eyes see things. They take in visual images," Mr. Dudeny said. "But something else makes sense of the things

our eyes see. Anybody want to guess what that something is?"

Clara's hand went up halfway before she pulled it down.

Mr. Dudeny had spotted her. "Yes, Clara?" He smiled an encouraging smile.

"Um . . . is it eyeglasses?"

"Eyeglasses do help make sense of what we see. But I was thinking of something besides eyeglasses."

Clara looked happy that at least her answer wasn't wrong. "It's our brain!" Tamar shouted out.

"I don't remember calling on you, Tamar. But yes. Our brain interprets—it makes sense of—what our eyes see. And sometimes our brain gets fooled."

Now Bree's hand was raised. "But our eyes can only see what's right in front of them, nothing else."

"I'm not sure what you are asking, Bree."



"I want to know if there's such a thing as second sight, like a sixth sense."

"Do you mean, can people see the future?"

Bree nodded. Her desk was next to Nancy's. But she avoided Nancy's eyes.

"Ooh! Ooh! Mr. Dudeny!" Grace was nearly bouncing out of her seat. "My aunt went to a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller said my aunt was going to get rich. The next day she found a one-hundred-dollar bill in a parking lot."

"Okay, cool. But did your aunt ever win the lottery? Or end up marrying a millionaire?" Robert wanted to know. "Um, not yet," Grace admitted. "Still, finding a hundred dollars . . . the very next day!"

Although several other hands were waving, it was almost lunchtime. So Mr. Dudeny had to table the discussion. That meant there was no more time to talk.

"We've been learning about the five senses." Mr. D paused. "Grace's aunt found a hundred dollars. Did the fortune-teller predict what would happen? No. I definitely don't think so." He looked around the class. "I'm sure all of us at some point have had a hunch—a sudden feeling about something—that came true. Is that the same as seeing the future? No." Mr. Dudeny wrote two words on the whiteboard: "coincidence" and "intuition." "By Friday, I'd like everyone to find out what these words mean and use them in a sentence."



"They won't be on the spelling test, will they?" Clara looked worried.

<sup>&</sup>quot;No, they won't."

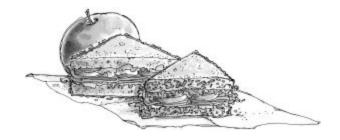
<sup>&</sup>quot;Whew!" said Clara, right as the lunch bell rang.





When Nancy reached the end of the cafeteria line, she was happy to see Bree waving to her from their favorite table. It was under a poster of the four food groups. After opening their lunch bags, they decided to trade sandwiches.

"Um, look, can I ask you something?" Bree said, handing over her tuna salad.



Uh-oh. Nancy had a hunch what the question would be. "Do you still think you have powers? You heard what Mr. D said."

Nancy saw that Bree wanted her to say no. Nancy took a bite of Bree's sandwich and thought about it. It was more than puzzling. It was perplexing. Lionel was certain she had powers. Yet if Nancy told Mr. D, he wouldn't believe it. And Mr. D was practically the most intelligent human being on the planet.

"I'm not sure," she finally said.

Clara and Tamar were setting down their trays. Then Grace appeared. "Come on, Nancy. Move over. There's room." After she squeezed onto the end of the bench, Grace stared at Nancy. "You know, those black dots on your ears look really dumb."

Nancy pretended not to hear.

Then Grace announced to everybody at the table, "Mr. D is wrong, by the way. W-R-O-N-G." That had been one of last week's spelling words.

"The fortune-teller my aunt went to definitely could see the future. She also said my aunt was going to travel to faroff places. And guess what? The next week a friend invited her to the North Pole."

"Grace, did you just make that up?" Clara said, shaking a little pile of Hershey's Kisses onto the table. Clara was very fortunate. Her mother packed candy for her every day.



"I don't think there *are* trips to the North Pole," Tamar added.

"That's how much you know! My aunt says she'll take me to the fortune-teller if I want." Then Grace added, "It costs thirty dollars."

Thirty dollars! Nancy hadn't realized fortune-telling paid so well. A person could make a fortune telling fortunes!

All of a sudden, Bree stood up. "This is a boring conversation. Fortune-tellers are fakes!" Then she picked up her tray and left. She didn't even bother taking any Hershey's Kisses.







After school, Lionel went home with Nancy. Tuesday was their weekly checkers game. The minute JoJo saw Lionel, she stopped blowing bubbles through the straw in her glass of milk.

"Show me magic!" she shouted.

"I don't have my wand with me."

"That's okay." Jojo handed him a straw.

So Lionel said, "Abracadabra," then waved the straw around and pulled a penny out of JoJo's ear.

JoJo shrieked with joy.

Lionel held the penny in his fist, then blew on it, and when his hand opened, the penny was gone.

JoJo hadn't seen it slip down Lionel's sleeve. "Do it again!" Nancy's dad appeared just then. "Blow some bubbles, JoJo. Leave Nancy and Houdini alone."

"Who? Who's Deenee?" JoJo asked.

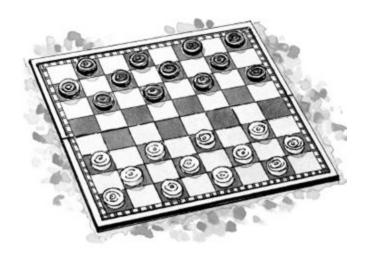
"I perform at birthday parties!" Lionel told Nancy and JoJo's dad as they headed upstairs. "My rates are very reasonable."

"Oh! That reminds me!" Nancy said to Lionel. He was walking up the stairs backward with his eyes closed. "Grace's aunt, the one she told us about? It cost her thirty dollars to get her fortune told."

Lionel opened his eyes and whistled. "That's major money!"

In her room, Nancy got out the checkerboard. They set up the checkers and started to play. So far Lionel was ahead fourteen games to twelve. Nancy rubbed her hands together. "I have a feeling that today you're going to get clobbered."

Lionel was thinking about his next move. Then, his head shot up. "Like those other feelings you got?"



Nancy looked up from the board and thought about it. "Yes! Just like them."

"See, what did I tell you? Your powers are growing. I think you should give some thought to going professional."

Even though Lionel was a total goofball, Nancy could tell he wasn't kidding. "Of course, you can't charge thirty dollars," he went on. "Not at first."



That made sense. "What price seems fair?" Nancy asked. "Mmmmm. Maybe a quarter," Lionel said. "A quarter a question."

A quarter a question. Ooh la la! That had a nice ring. Nancy imagined a stack of quarters that kept growing taller and taller. She imagined all the earrings for pierced ears that she'd buy. By the time her birthday rolled around, she'd need an earring tree like Annie's.

"I could turn the clubhouse into a fortune-telling parlor."

"No. Do it at school during recess. Think of all the customers right there."

That was a superb point. Of course, not every third grader was going to pay Nancy to see the future. Nancy bet Bree wouldn't. In fact, if Bree were here right now, she'd probably have lots of reasons why going into the fortune-telling business was a bad idea. But Bree wasn't here. She was at her piano lesson.

Nancy jumped up to get her art supplies. "I need a sign!" Nancy loved making signs. Ones in neon colors with fancy lettering.



They forgot about checkers and went to work.

The sign was super. It said:

Find out the future!

Only a quarter a question!

Lionel wanted to add "Satisfaction guaranteed!" at the bottom. Nancy didn't.

"That's too much pressure on me. I can't promise that every single thing I predict will come true."

Afterward, they painted Nancy's old Magic 8 Ball silver. Now it looked kind of like a crystal ball. The Magic 8 Ball had stopped working after JoJo dropped it and it cracked. But Nancy still remembered all the eerie answers that floated up. She'd use them tomorrow with her customers. All signs point to yes. . . . It is unclear at this time. . . . Highly doubtful. . . . Ask again later.

"All I need now is the right ensemble." Nancy explained to Lionel that ensemble meant her outfit. "I need a shawl for sure. One with fringe. A long, colorful skirt, maybe with ruffles, and gold dangly earrings."





The fashion part of fortune-telling didn't interest Lionel. So Nancy waited until his mom came to pick him up. Then she raced next door to see Mrs. DeVine. Practically everything in Mrs. DeVine's closet was perfect for fortune-telling!

Later, Nancy tried on the clothes and jewelry that Mrs. DeVine had let her borrow. She had to roll up the skirt around her waist, and the clip-on earrings pinched a lot. Still, gazing at herself in the mirror, Nancy had to admit it: She looked like a professional.



She called Lionel. "The crystal ball is almost dry and I've got my ensemble."

"Don't forget the sign," Lionel said. He was going to walk around the playground with it at the beginning of recess. "Wait a few minutes before you come out. Let the excitement build."

Ooh la la! Nancy would get to make a grand entrance!

Nancy had a hard time falling asleep that night. A funny feeling started bubbling up in her tummy. It wasn't one of her fortune-telling feelings. It was probably excitement. She hadn't told Bree about tomorrow. She hadn't discussed her new career with her parents, either. However, there was nothing wrong with using her powers to make money. Lionel made money from magic shows. Then a superb idea struck Nancy. The bubbly feeling went away. She wouldn't keep all of the fortune-telling money for herself. She'd give some away to a good cause. Just like Annie was doing with her hair for Locks of Love. That would make her parents proud.

They'd say, "Oh, Nancy. What a lovely gesture!"





The next day, as soon as the bell for recess rang, Nancy grabbed her backpack and ducked into the girls' room. Lickety-split she changed into her ensemble and flung open the door to the hallway.

"Ow!" someone yelped.

The door had whacked someone!

It was Bree. Her hand was cupped over her nose. "Is it bleeding?" Bree asked.

Nancy nodded. Bree was trying hard not to cry. She hated the sight of blood, especially her own.

Nancy raced back into the girls' room for a wad of toilet paper. When she pushed open the door, slowly this time, Mr. Dudeny was in the hallway kneeling beside Bree. He had Kleenex for her.

"I'm so sorry!" Nancy said.

"What happened?" Mr. Dudeny asked.

Nancy told him. "It's all my fault! I feel terrible!" Tears pricked the corners of Nancy's eyes. "Mr. D, can I go with Bree to the nurse, please?"

"No, I'll take Bree. You go to recess. And next time, remember how heavy that door is and—"

"I know. Use caution," Nancy answered. Mr. Dudeny often said that to kids. It meant be careful.

Mr. D put an arm around Bree and led her down the hall.

Nancy was stunned. Why hadn't her powers warned her that an accident was going to happen?

On the playground, Lionel was parading around with the sign. "What's in *your* future? Just ask Nancy!" he shouted over and over.



Nancy made a grand entrance, though her heart wasn't really in it. She hoped Bree's nose had stopped bleeding. At a bench near the monkey bars, Nancy sat down with the crystal ball in her lap. In a minute a couple of kids showed

up. Then a few more. A line was forming. Ooh la la! This was exciting. All these people were seeking the advice of a professional—Nancy Clancy!



For now Nancy decided to put Bree out of her mind. She needed to concentrate on her powers. She closed her eyes halfway and smiled in a way that she hoped looked mysterious. "I am ready now."

Then Grace barged to the front of the line and tried to wreck everything.

"No fair! Nancy got this idea from me! After she heard about my aunt!"

"I did not," Nancy said with dignity. "I happen to have powers."

"Oh, right!" Grace's arms were folded across her chest. "Be—besides," she stammered angrily, "you need a license to tell fortunes! It's the law!"



Nancy was pretty sure Grace was making that up. Then Lionel appeared and told Grace to get to the back of the line. Instead, Grace stomped off. "If you want to waste your money, go ahead!" Grace told all the kids in line.

Joel was up first. He handed over a quarter and asked, "Will I be an astronaut when I grow up?"



Nancy didn't need to wait for her powers to kick in. Every Halloween, Joel went as an astronaut. Next summer he was going to space camp. And he'd read every book in the library about the solar system. Nancy rubbed the crystal ball and made her eyelids flutter. "All signs point to yes."



Olivia was next. She asked, "Will my mom have a girl?" The baby was going to be born soon. Nancy knew that Olivia wanted a little sister. "It is almost certain!" she said.

The line grew longer. The questions got harder.

Robert wanted to know which team would win the Super Bowl. Nola wanted to know what play the third grade was going to put on. The teachers were keeping it a secret until next week.

Both times Nancy scrunched her eyes shut and concentrated on letting her powers go to work. But no answers floated into her mind. She ended up saying, "It's not clear at this time."



Robert and Nola looked disappointed, which made Nancy feel bad. But they paid anyway. After that Nancy told customers to stick to yes-or-no questions. "My powers work better that way," she explained.

"Okay." Nola fished out another quarter from her pocket. "Will I get to go to Disney World over spring break?"

"Yes," Nancy said after a moment. But it was just a guess. Not even a hunch. Nola let out a happy squeal. Somehow that made Nancy feel even worse.

What was going on? Her powers seemed to have deserted her. It was very noisy on the playground. Maybe that was the problem. In the class unit on the five senses, Nancy had learned about sound waves. It was very possible that all the sound waves bouncing around were getting in the way of the waves that were trying to travel from the future.



Nancy was relieved when the line came to an end. Clara was the last person in it.

"Will I get everything right on the spelling test tomorrow?" Clara asked.

Without thinking, Nancy blurted out, "It is highly doubtful."

"Rats!" Clara said.

Right away Nancy wished she could take back the words. Nancy didn't want to take Clara's money. Clara insisted.

"I figured that'd be the answer." Clara shrugged. "It's not your fault what the future holds."





**B** ree wasn't in the classroom when Nancy returned from recess.

"Is Bree still at the nurse's?" she asked Mr. Dudeny. Nancy was back in her normal clothes now. The earrings had pinched so hard, they left red marks.

"No. The nosebleed stopped right away. However, her head was hurting a little. So her mother came and took her home."

Nancy's hands flew to her heart. "I feel so guilty! I'm to blame for this!"

"It wasn't a serious accident," Mr. Dudeny assured her. He let Nancy call Bree on his cell phone. She was eating ice cream and sounded fine.

"Merci a million times, Mr. D," Nancy said. "Hearing Bree's voice was such a relief!"

Still, during creative writing, Nancy had trouble working on a new adventure for Lucette Fromage. She was a nineyear-old detective Nancy had made up.

Nancy's mind kept wandering. If only there was a way to make the past un-happen . . . like rewinding a video. Everything from today would run backward at top speed until Nancy was changing in the girls' room before recess. After the stop button was pushed and the action started up again, Nancy would open the bathroom door—very slowly the first time. Nancy would also take back her answer to Clara's question about the spelling test.



Nancy watched Clara at her desk. She was twirling her pencil and staring into space. Suddenly inspiration struck. That meant Nancy was getting a good idea. Maybe even a superb one.

"Can you bike over to my house this afternoon?" she asked Clara later. "I want to tutor you in spelling. Tutoring is like teaching, only in private. We'll go over the words until you can even spell them backward."



Clara giggled. Then she shrugged. "It won't do any good. Remember what you predicted?"

"I'm really sorry about that."

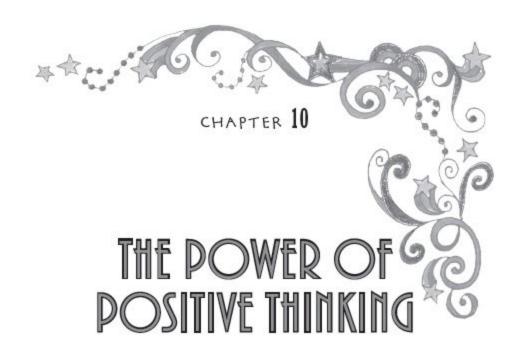
"Why? You can't help what you saw." Clara shrugged again. "I always goof up spelling words."

"But the test hasn't happened yet. There's time to change the future."

Clara looked uncertain. "You really think it works that way?"

Nancy nodded. "All signs point to yes."





Clara arrived as Nancy was setting up the stand on her old blackboard. It belonged to JoJo now. JoJo agreed to let Nancy use it on one condition.

- "I get to play school too," she said.
- "I told you. We're not playing school. It's serious work."
- "JoJo can stay. I don't mind," Clara said. She thought JoJo was cute.

Nancy wrote out all the spelling words. They were fivesense words all ending in "-ing," except the word of the week. That was "fragrant."

seeing tasting hearing eating feeling smelling sniffing touching peering \*fragrant

First Nancy had Clara spell the words while looking at them on the blackboard. "Now close your eyes. I'll say each word and you spell it back to me."

Clara wanted to skip the word of the week. "It's too hard. I'll never remember it."

"Clara, you have to have a positive attitude," Nancy said. "But we can leave 'fragrant' for the very end."

Pretty soon Clara could spell nearly all the words. But she kept mixing up "hearing" and "peering." She spelled them "heering" and "pearing."

"Remember Mr. D's trick? 'Hearing' has 'ear' in it." Nancy circled the "ear" part with her chalk. It made her feel very professional.

Clara nodded. "Still, I don't see why 'peering' isn't spelled like 'hearing.' They rhyme."

Clara had a point.

"It's snack time now," JoJo interrupted.

"No, it isn't," Nancy said.

"JoJo, why don't you be in charge of snacks?" Clara suggested.



JoJo clapped her hands. "I'm snack leader! Goody!" She skipped out of the room.

"Smart move!" Nancy high-fived Clara. Then she went back to the spelling list. She peered at the word "peering."

"Hey! I thought of a trick." Nancy giggled. "All you have to do is remember that 'peering' has 'pee' in it." Nancy drew a chalk circle around the letters.

Clara giggled too. She closed her eyes. "P-E-E," Clara began. She spelled "peering" correctly three times.



They were working on "fragrant" when JoJo reappeared with a plate of cookies and apple slices. At the same time, the bell rang on the Top-Secret Special Delivery mailbox.

Nancy opened her window and pulled in the basket. It hung from a rope strung between her window and Bree's.



"Before you came, I sent a message to Bree asking if she wanted company," Nancy explained to Clara as she unfolded the message. "Oh, good. Bree says to come over now."

They brought the cookies with them.

Bree was in her parents' bedroom. She was lying on a chaise. That is a kind of armchair that stretches way out in front. You say it like this: "shays."



Bree had a little plastic bag with ice pressed against her face. "Look!" she said, and lowered the plastic bag.

Bree had a black eye! Except it wasn't black. It was purplish.

"Oh, chérie! I'm so sorry! Does it hurt?"

"No. It feels fine. I have to keep ice on it so it doesn't swell up."

"It's a pretty color," Clara said.

Nancy agreed. "It's the same shade as that eye shadow Annie has. Purple Passion."

While they were eating the cookies, Clara told Bree about Nancy helping her for the spelling test. "So the future won't come true," Clara explained.

Nancy's cookie dried up in her mouth.

Bree looked perplexed. "What?"

"Bree! You were there when Nancy was telling fortunes, remember?" Then Clara smacked her forehead. "Silly me! I

forgot. You weren't there. It was at recess."

Nancy stood up. "Um, Clara, maybe we should let Bree rest some more."

"No. Come on. I want to hear." The bag of ice covered half of Bree's face, which made it hard for Nancy to tell what Bree was thinking.

So Clara filled Bree in. At the end, she said, "I better get going now. I have to bike home before dark or my mom'll kill me." Clara grabbed a cookie for the road.

When it was just the two of them, Bree asked, "How much money did you make?"

"A dollar seventy-five. Are you mad?"

"No. It's not fair to be mad. I'm not the boss of you." Bree split the last cookie with Nancy. "Are you going to tell fortunes again tomorrow?"

Nancy sank down on the end of the chaise. "I don't think so." She paused. "No. I'm not." Bree was her best friend. She could tell her anything. "I was just guessing answers. I think my powers ran out."



"You mean like a flashlight battery?"

"Yes, Bree. Just like that. Otherwise I wouldn't have bonked you in the face."

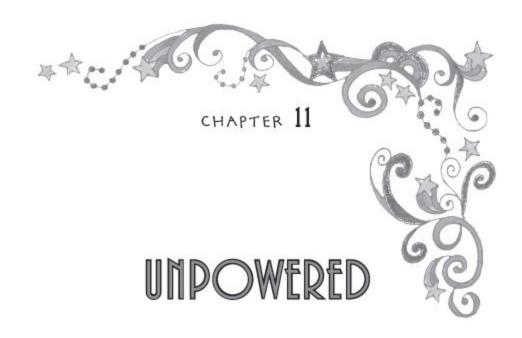
"But you didn't know I was on the other side of the door. It was just an accident."

Nancy sighed. "Exactly. My powers should have seen the accident coming and warned me. And they didn't."

Right at that moment, Bree's mom popped her head in. "Sorry, ladies. It's time for Nancy to go home. And Bree, keep the ice pack on!"







The next morning, Bree was back in school but Clara was out sick. That was a shame. Clara was going to miss the spelling test. Last night Nancy had called to tutor her on "fragrant." Nancy couldn't think of any trick to learn it. She just made Clara repeat the letters over and over. By the time they hung up, Clara had "fragrant" down cold.

Nancy, however, got it wrong on the test. She forgot the second *r*. Nancy hadn't predicted she'd get "fragrant" wrong. She also hadn't predicted it would rain. Otherwise she wouldn't have worn her gold clogs. It looked like her powers were gone for good. *Au revoir.* 

On the screen in the gym, a bunch of kids in China were flying kites that looked like dragons. Nancy didn't mind being stuck indoors or sitting through the movie about foreign children. Because there was no recess, she didn't have to make up excuses about why she wasn't telling fortunes.

At the end of the day Mr. Dudeny reminded everybody about the words "intuition" and "coincidence." "Dudes, find out what they mean and we'll discuss them tomorrow."

As soon as Nancy got home, she tried to look up both words in her dictionary. Neither word was there. So Nancy went downstairs to the living room and looked up the definitions in the big dictionary. Oh, how she adored long words—and "definition" was such a superb one. It was a long word that explained what other long words, and short ones, too, meant.



Frenchy had been sleeping in her doggy bed. Now she jumped on the couch and curled up next to Nancy. "Coincidence" came before "intuition," so Nancy looked that up first.

A "coincidence" meant something surprising and unusual that happened just by chance. Bree's parents both had the same birthday. That counted as a coincidence. Was it fair, Nancy wondered, for her to use that example in class tomorrow? The coincidence belonged to Bree, after all. On the other hand, two people could think of the same example. Maybe that counted as a coincidence too!

"Intuition" meant a good guess. Long ago, when the Clancys had gone to an animal shelter in town, Nancy's intuition had told her Frenchy was the right puppy to bring home.

The phone in the kitchen started ringing.

Nancy heard her mom say, "Oh, hi! Yes, sure I've got a minute."

After that her mom said, "She was doing what?"

And after that she said, "No! I had no idea."

Nancy wished she could hear the other side of the conversation. She bet JoJo had been bad again at preschool. Last week JoJo's teacher had called because JoJo kept hogging all the blocks in the blocks corner.

"Well, I'm very sorry about this. I'm going to discuss this with her right now!"

Ooh, it looked like JoJo was really in for it.

"Nancy!" her mom called loudly. "Nancy! Where are you?" Say what?

"In here," Nancy answered in a small voice. "Doing homework."



Her mom strode into the living room. Frenchy jumped off the couch and skittered upstairs. Frenchy could always smell trouble.

"Clara's mother just called," Nancy's mom said. "It seems we have a little situation here."

A situation? That was never good.

"Yesterday . . . were children paying you to tell their fortunes?"

"Um. Yes."

"And did you tell Clara that she wasn't going to do well on a spelling test?"

"Not exactly. I said it was highly doubtful. But then I tutored her."

Her mom just kept shaking her head. "Well, Clara stayed home today pretending to be sick. Later her mother found out the real reason. Clara didn't want to take the spelling test."

"But she knew all the words. Even 'fragrant.' I spent ages tutoring her," Nancy repeated, hoping her mom might say what a thoughtful gesture that was.

"Clara woke up with a tummy ache. She was nervous because of your prediction."



Nancy sighed. "I explained how it didn't have to come true, how we could change the future." She shut the big dictionary. "If you ask me, Clara needs to get a more positive attitude."

"No. That is not the prob—" Nancy's mom rubbed her forehead. She blinked and looked confused. "Hold on a minute. Are you saying that you honestly believe you can see the future?"

Nancy nodded. "I could for a while. I had powers. Remember the pizza and the call from Grandma? I said both were going to happen and they did."

"Oh, honey. Those were hunches. Good guesses."

"You mean intuition."

"Exactly. Think how often Dad brings home pizza. And how many nights does the phone ring during dinner and it's Grandma?"

"Well, w-well—I predicted rain the next day, and it did."

"Which day? Tuesday?"

Nancy nodded.

"The Weather Channel said there'd be rain."

Nancy spread out her hands. "But did I know that? No!"



"Yes, as a matter of fact, you did. When you came home from Annie's, you sat in the living room with Dad and me. The Weather Channel was on. You described Annie's earring tree in great detail and asked if I'd reconsider letting you get your ears pierced. Remember?"

Hmmmm. Perhaps Nancy did recall that part.

"The weather report was on the whole time. Even though you weren't paying attention," her mom went on, "it must have stuck in the back of your mind."

"Really?" Nancy sat back and pondered. Pondering meant her brain was thinking extra hard. So . . . her ears had heard things while her brain was half switched off? Did that mean she'd never had powers? Then Nancy remembered the coin toss with Lionel. Ha! Her mother couldn't explain that away. "Mom, I called a coin toss right three times in a row. Are you saying that was only a coincidence?"

"No. It was luck. Odds. Every time a coin is tossed, there's a fifty percent chance it'll come up what you call."

Room 3D hadn't gotten to "percent" yet. "What?" Nancy asked.

Her mom reached into a pocket of her jeans. She got out a nickel and tossed it up. "Heads or tails?"

Lionel's nickel had worked much better than her mother's nickel. This time, Nancy missed the coin toss two out of three times.

"Sweetie, you can't see the future. Nobody can." Her mother put an arm around Nancy. "All you can do is work hard so there's a better chance of making things turn out the way you want. That's what you were doing when you helped Clara."



Nancy leaned her head against her mother's shoulder. Her mother always smelled a little like warm bread. It wasn't perfume. It was a special mom scent.

"Do you understand what I'm saying, Nancy?"

"Yes. Mr. Dudeny said the same thing." Nancy pondered some more and came to a conclusion. "It's probably better

that my powers weren't real." It had been exciting. It made her feel special. But what if she'd started seeing scary stuff that was going to happen? Nancy imagined herself running around trying to warn people about earthquakes or alien invasions. No. Not alien invasions. They weren't real either.

Her mom smiled at her. She didn't look angry anymore. Then she said, "So tomorrow, I want you to return the money to everyone."

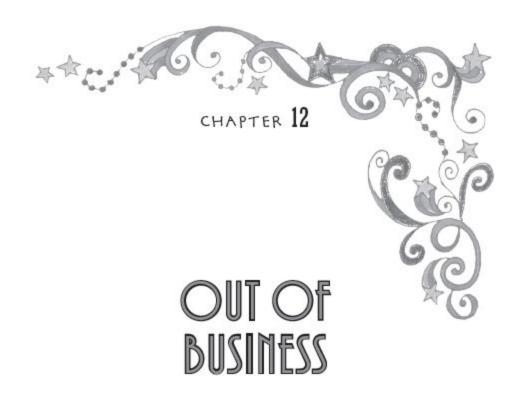
Nancy felt like she'd been zapped in the back with a joy buzzer. "No! Please don't make me do that! Can't I just give the money to a good cause? I was going to anyway." Then Nancy added, "Well, not all of it. But some."

Her mom didn't answer right away.

"Please, Mom. Please," Nancy pleaded. "What'll I say? That I'm a big fake? Grace will never let me live it down!"

Her mom seemed to be pondering now. Finally she stood up and said, "Honey, you're not a little girl anymore. You're old enough to decide for yourself what to say."





The next morning, Nancy and Bree met up at the corner. Bree was wearing sunglasses to protect her black eye and looked *très* glamorous. Nancy had a bunch of envelopes in her backpack—with the money she was giving back—as well as a perfect excuse. She had written a note that said:

It has come to my attention that no one is permitted to make money on school property. So I am returning your money. I have also decided to quit the fortune-telling business for good.

Yours truly, Nancy Clancy

"You were right all along," Nancy admitted to Bree as they walked to school. "I never had powers. Nobody does. All the

stuff that I thought was seeing the future was only good guessing."

Bree stopped on the sidewalk. "Okay . . . I have to admit something to you too." Bree scrunched up her face. "I didn't want you to have powers. . . . I was jealous. You had something special that I didn't."

"So you believed in my powers!"

"A little. I wasn't sure. It also made you too different from me. That made me feel funny. I like us both just being regular girls."

Yes, Nancy could understand that. "My fortune-telling ensemble sure was lovely. I wish you had seen it. I wore a long, ruffly skirt of Mrs. DeVine's and a shawl and these big clip-on gold earrings."

At school Mr. Dudeny asked everyone to wait outside the classroom for a minute. "Clara is almost done taking the spelling test that she missed."

When the door opened again, Clara was hopping around her desk doing a little victory dance.



"I nailed it!" She came over and hugged Nancy. "I remembered 'ear' in 'hearing"—she lowered her voice—"and 'pee' in 'peering.' My mom says that seeing the future is crazy talk but that you're right about having a positive attitude."

Nancy decided to hand out the envelopes at recess. Grace was busy jumping rope, double Dutch, with girls from one of the other third-grade classes.

First Nancy went up to Joel. Joel was kneeling in the dirt. "Eight, seven, six . . ." he counted down. Nancy waited for his Lego spaceship to blast off.



"Joel, I have something for you."

Joel wasn't paying attention. "This is Mission Control. The third-stage rockets have fired. You are leaving Earth's atmosphere."

Nancy was about to leave the envelope on the ground, where he'd be sure to see it. Then something really weird happened. Nancy's hands tore open the envelope and took out the quarter. Her finger tapped Joel on the back, and when he spun around, she held out the quarter. "I shouldn't have taken money from you. I can't see the future."

Joel looked irritated at being interrupted. "I never really thought you could." He pocketed the quarter. Then he went back to zooming his spaceship around and around.

Nancy told the truth to everybody. It turned out not to be a big deal. Lionel was the most disappointed. "Your career was just getting started!"

As soon as she got home, Nancy told her mother about returning the money. "Nobody was mad. And Grace doesn't even know. I had this great excuse made up, but something stopped me from fibbing. Mom, it was like this invisible force

came out of nowhere and took possession of me! It forced me to tell the truth."

Her mom smiled and kissed the top of Nancy's head. "I know about that kind of invisible force. . . . It's called your conscience."







On Saturday, Bree and Nancy ran into Annie at Belle's Fashion Boutique. Her hair was very short.

"It's most becoming," Nancy said to be polite. She could tell Bree didn't like Annie's haircut either.

"Up till when I sat down in the chair at the salon, I thought I was going to get the hairstyle with bangs, the one Nancy predicted," Annie said. "Then I changed my mind. This is called the Chop."

It didn't surprise Nancy that another one of her predictions turned out to be wrong. However, as they waved good-bye to Annie, Nancy told Bree, "I can make one prediction that I absolutely, positively know will come true."



They had been looking through the jewelry case. Bree wanted to know which earrings Nancy liked best, and Bree would buy them for her birthday. Now suddenly, an "Oh no, not the powers again!" look came over Bree's face.

Then Nancy said, "I can predict right now what I'm going to be next Halloween."

Bree giggled. "I bet I can predict that too." At the same time they both said, "A fortune-teller!"

## **Credits**

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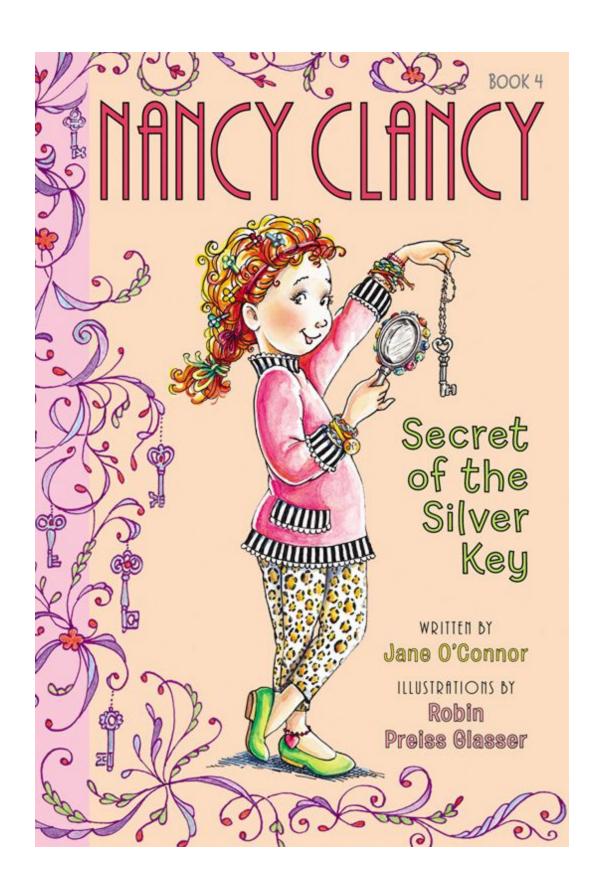
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FIRST EDITION





### **DEDICATION**

For the Handler, who is key in all things! —J.O'C.

For my childhood pal, Wendy Frontiero —R.P.G.

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**Credits** 

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### PAST, PRESENT, future

"That's really a camera?" Lionel asked. Nancy could see the skeptical look on his face. "Skeptical" was a new favorite word of hers. It meant a person doubted whether something was true.

"Yup, it belonged to my mom," Mr. Dudeny said. "Fifty years ago, Polaroid cameras like this one were high-tech. They let people take photos in a brand-new way." Nancy's teacher was holding up a silver and black box so everyone in room 3D could see it. The front of the camera pulled out like an accordion with a large, round lens on the end.

"You put in film, snapped a picture, and out popped a piece of paper. In about a minute you'd see the picture appear on it."

"Ooh! It sounds like magic," Clara said. "Can you show how it works?"

"Unfortunately, no. The kind of film you need is hard to find and pretty expensive now. But I have some Polaroid pictures taken with this camera."

Mr. D passed around a bunch of small, square photos. The colors in all of them were very faded. "My mother is the girl in the tie-dye T-shirt."



"Mr. D, your mom and her friends were hippies!" Nancy said. She and Bree were looking at a photo of a boy with hair down to his shoulders and another of two girls with their arms around each other, one in a floppy hat and blue granny glasses and the other wearing lots of love beads and a necklace with a peace sign.

Grace sat, twirling her pencil and looking bored. "I don't see what's so great. Now you can take photos with a phone and see them in a second. You don't even need a camera."

"Well, Grace, that's the point I'm about to make. A long time ago, this camera was brand-new and cool. Now it's something from the past." Mr. Dudeny took out his cell phone from his pocket. "I bet fifty years from now third graders will look at this and say, 'That thing is really a phone?"

Nancy mulled over Mr. D's words, which meant she was thinking about them really hard. Once the past hadn't been the past. It had been just like this very moment, sitting in her classroom. The present. And in the future, this very moment would turn into the past. Nancy blinked and shook her head. All this mulling was making her brain feel twisted up like a pretzel.

"Next week, I would like each of you to bring in something from present time. Nothing big. Something that tells about what life is like today—like a desk calendar for this year or the front page of a newspaper. We are going to put everything in a box."

"You mean, like, a time capsule?" Lionel said. "Awesome!"

"Ooh—and can it have a sign on the front that says 'Do not open until 2064'?" Nancy asked.

Mr. D nodded and explained that their time capsule would be stored in the basement.

"Maybe in fifty years my child will go to school here and get to open it," Clara said.

Grace rolled her eyes. "Clara. Do the math. In fifty years you'll be nearly sixty. Your children won't be kids anymore. They'll be grown-ups too."

Clara pooched out her lips and looked disappointed. "Oh yeah, you're right." Then she brightened. "Well . . . then maybe my grandchildren will get to open it." Clara giggled. "Imagine! Me, a grandma!"

"And for Monday," Mr. Dudeny went on, "I'd like each of you to interview somebody who was your age a long time ago. Thirty, forty, or even fifty years ago. Find out where they grew up and what it was like being a kid back then. What was happening in the world? Who was president? Were there exciting new inventions? Any crazy fads?"

Bree was furiously scribbling down everything Mr. D said. Then she turned and whispered to Nancy, "Dibs on Mrs. DeVine."

"No fair!" Nancy whispered back. Mrs. DeVine was their neighbor and also a senior citizen. She was the perfect person to interview, and Nancy had just as much right to pick Mrs. DeVine as Bree did.

Nancy raised her hand and waved it around it until she got her teacher's attention. "Mr. D, Mr. D! What if two people want to interview the same person?"



Mr. D said that wasn't a problem.

"Let's do the interview together. It'll be way more fun that way," Nancy suggested right after the last bell rang.

"Okay. Sure!" Then suddenly Bree looked uncertain. "Hmmmm. Maybe that's not allowed." Bree was always very particular about following homework rules. So before heading outside to where their bikes were parked, they got the okay from their teacher.

By the time they biked home, a plan was in place. In the clubhouse in Nancy's backyard, they made a beautiful invitation to slip under Mrs. DeVine's door.

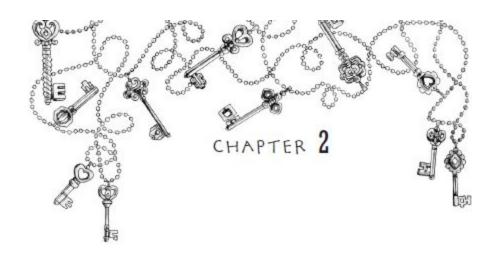


"It's so weird to think Mrs. DeVine was our age once," Bree said, placing the cap back on a hot-pink marker.

"Everything about time is weird when you really start thinking about it," Nancy said. She sat back on her knees and pondered. "Right now, Monday is the future. And by Monday, today will already be the past. Doesn't it make your brain feel twisted up like a pretzel?"

Bree thought for a moment. Then she giggled and said, "No. More like scrambled eggs!"





## THE INTERVIEW

**Bree James:** Thank you very much, Mrs. DeVine, for agreeing to this interview. We will now begin. My first question for you is: Who was the president of the United States when you were born?

Mrs. DeVine: It was Harry Truman. He became president at the very end of World War II in 1945. That was the year I was born. Actually, he liked to be known as Harry S. Truman. Although he didn't have a middle name, he picked a middle initial for himself. I guess he thought it made him sound more important, more distinguished.

**Nancy Clancy:** Where were you born? Was it in this country or were you an immigrant?

**Mrs. DeVine:** Why, I was born right in this very town! Only, it wasn't much of a town then. There was still lots of farmland.

**Bree James:** Were there any amazing new inventions like the Polaroid camera?

**Mrs. DeVine:** Oh, yes! TV. Television screens were tiny at first, and you needed antennas—"rabbit ears," we called them—to keep the picture in focus. And the shows were all in black-and-white.

**Nancy Clancy:** What were your favorites?

**Mrs. DeVine:** That's easy: *I Love Lucy.* I'd go over to my best friend's house to watch, because her family had a TV set long before mine did. Lucy was a grown woman, but she and her friend Ethel would get themselves into the craziest trouble! My best friend and I were jealous because nothing crazy ever happened to us.

Nancy Clancy: Who was your best friend?

**Mrs. DeVine:** Her name was Bitsy. But she wasn't little. In fact she was very tall for her age. Bitsy was a nickname for Elizabeth.

**Bree James:** Since Nancy asked two questions in a row, I get to ask two now. What did you do for fun? I mean, besides watching TV? And were there any fads?

Mrs. DeVine: Oh, we did a lot of same things you girls like to do. We rode our bikes, we played board games like Monopoly and Sorry! And we read all of the Nancy Drew books.

**Bree James:** What about fads?

**Mrs. DeVine:** Bitsy and I loved jacks. I was very good. I could do lots of tricks, which were called "fancies" and had names like Snake in the Grass and Backsies. Slinkys were very popular too. Bitsy and I would have races to see whose Slinky would tumble downstairs the fastest.



Nancy Clancy: What kind of clothes did you wear?
Mrs. DeVine: Girls wore skirts most of the time. Poodle skirts were the rage. And if we wore pants, they weren't blue jeans. Blues were for boys and were called "dungarees." I brought over an old photo album so you can see what kids looked like in the 1950s.

**Nancy Clancy:** This brings our interview to a close. Thank you, Mrs. DeVine. Your answers have told us many interesting things about the days of yore.





## f LONG-LOST frithd

"Does Bitsy live close by now? Do you still see each other all the time?" Nancy asked before biting into a Nilla wafer cookie. Now with the interview over, refreshments were being served in the clubhouse.

Mrs. DeVine shook her head. "I'm afraid we lost touch ages ago. Her family moved when we were about twelve. We tried staying in touch, but once we weren't neighbors or going to the same school, well"—Mrs. DeVine shrugged her shoulders—"it just wasn't the same."

Bree was drinking pink lemonade out of a teacup. She gulped and sputtered, "That's so terrible. To lose your best friend!"

Nancy felt the exact same way.

"We didn't have a falling-out or anything. We just drifted apart. Bitsy had new friends. So did I. We didn't have much in common anymore."

"When was the last time you saw each other?" Nancy asked.

"Why, it was so long ago, I don't even remember." Mrs. DeVine pursed her lips, which were Passionately Red. That was the name of the lipstick she always wore. "Oh, I do know. We bumped into each other at a clothing store. We both had our eyes on the same prom dress. So that had to be . . ." Mrs. DeVine paused and started ticking off years on her fingers. Her long fingernails were Passionately Red too. "Well, I can't believe it, but it must have been nearly fifty years ago!"

Nancy and Bree exchanged identical looks. They were way more than surprised. They were stupefied. "But you were best friends. And—and you both liked the same exact dress. That proves you still had stuff in common," Nancy said. The longest she and Bree had gone without seeing each other was four weeks last summer, when both their families took two-week vacations and the weeks didn't overlap. Even with email and phone calls, it had seemed like forever. An eternity.

"Bitsy was a wonderful girl. I remember her with great fondness," Mrs. DeVine went on. "There's a special closeness with your first best friend. Now, scoot a little closer. I'm sure there are pictures of Bitsy in here." Mrs. DeVine opened the red spiral-bound album that she'd brought over.

"That's yours truly!" Mrs. DeVine laughed, pointing to a photo of a girl on a swing.

"No way!" Bree cried. "I never would have guessed."

Nancy wouldn't have either. It was hard to imagine the girl in the photo who had dark braids and wore eyeglasses turning into their glamorous neighbor with her platinumblond hair and false eyelashes.

"There. That's Bitsy with me at a county fair."



In the photo, Bitsy stood half a head taller than Mrs. DeVine, only she wasn't Mrs. DeVine back then, Nancy realized. She was called Margie, which was short for Marjorie. The girls had their arms around each other and, in their free hands, they held paper cones of cotton candy. Their mouths were wide-open, as if they'd just heard the punch line to a really funny joke.

Although the photo showed two happy friends, it made Nancy sad to look at it. And what did Mrs. DeVine mean about having a "first best friend"? A best friend was forever. Nancy looked over at Bree, who was turning the pages of the album. Sure, sometimes they got into fights, but they loved each other.

"Mrs. DeVine, what if Nancy and I tried tracking Bitsy down for you? Imagine seeing each other after all these years."

Yes! Finding a missing person! How thrilling that would be. "We have excellent sleuthing skills," Nancy added. "We figured out who stole something valuable from our classroom, and we did it by cleverly following clues." Nancy hoped that didn't sound like she was bragging. But she and Bree were sharp detectives. The only problem was that there hadn't been any crimes lately. Finding a missing person wasn't like a robbery. Still, it was mysterious.

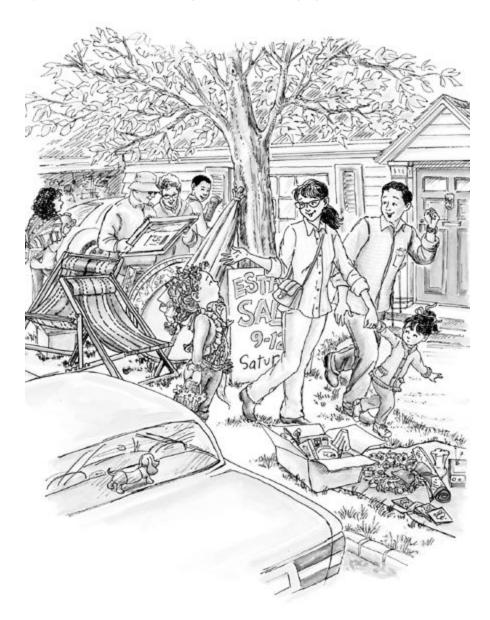
It was obvious, however, that Mrs. DeVine didn't take their offer seriously. "Oh no. I wouldn't know where to tell you to start looking. Bitsy might be anywhere on the planet."

As soon as Mrs. DeVine left the clubhouse, Nancy turned to Bree. "Hold up your hand. We have to take a solemn oath. We have to promise we'll always stay best friends."



Bree raised her hand. "Yes, we'll never lose touch, even if you are living on the North Pole and I end up at the South Pole."

Then, just to be doubly sure, they pinkie locked on it.





## ESTATE Sale

"Take the next left," Nancy's mom told her dad.

Nancy was excited. They were going to an estate sale. Estates were like mansions—big and fancy—so the furniture for sale was sure to be fancy too. Nancy needed a desk. Up until now she had to do all her homework on her old play table, which was moving into JoJo's room. As a third grader, Nancy required something more grown up, with drawers for her pens and pencils, a place for her schoolbooks, and room for a laptop computer. . . . That is, for whenever she got a laptop computer.

"Maybe we'll find a rare and valuable antique," Nancy said. She was holding her nose, so when she spoke, it sounded as if she had a cold. Last week, driving to Grandpa's, JoJo had regurgitated all over the backseat. It still smelled a little of throw-up.

"An antique? Sure. As long as it costs less than twenty-five dollars," Nancy's mom said.

"My tummy feels funny," JoJo whined.

Nancy's mom swiveled around. "Hold tight, honey! We're almost there."

A moment later the Clancys' car pulled up near a house where several other cars were parked. On the front lawn were some old beach chairs and umbrellas as well as a plastic sandbox with no sand in it. A sign on a tree said, *Estate Sale 9–12 Saturday*.

The house looked a lot like Nancy's, only not as nice. It was painted a funny gray color that reminded Nancy of chewed gum. "If you ask me, that sign is false advertising," Nancy said, disappointed. "This is no estate. This is just an ordinary tag sale."

"I don't know. I'm getting good vibes," her dad said, rubbing his hands together as they walked in the front door.

"Remember, Doug. We're here to get a desk for Nancy. Nothing else."

Nancy's dad couldn't resist buying goofy stuff at tag sales, like the cracked Smurfette mug that he found a couple of weeks ago. "Only twenty cents—can you believe it?" he'd said.

Unfortunately her dad's vibes didn't mean anything. There was no desk for sale, and after Nancy's mom dragged him away from a stack of old *MAD* magazines, they returned to the car and moved on to the next tag sale on her mom's list. No luck there, either, but at the third stop, in an upstairs bedroom of the house, Nancy came upon a small wooden desk with a top that rolled up and down. Although there were lots of scratches on the wood, the desk had a row of little drawers inside as well as cubbyholes. "That's where I could keep letters and other important correspondence," Nancy said.

Her mom had JoJo by the hand. "Doug, jiggle the desk to make sure the legs are sturdy." Then she turned to Nancy. "So? What do you think?"



"Can we repaint it?" Nancy asked.

"Sure."

"The price is right," Dad said, looking at the tag. "Twenty bucks."

"Oh, I can do way better than that." Nancy's mom suddenly had a gleam in her eyes. She marched downstairs to find the lady who owned the house. Nancy, her dad, and JoJo followed behind.

"Your mother has turned bargaining into an art form," her dad said. "Watch her closely, Nancy. Learn from a pro."

Sure enough, after Mom mentioned the scratches on the desk and brought up the fact that one of the legs wobbled and a knob was missing from a drawer, the price for the desk came down to five dollars. While her mom was bargaining, Nancy browsed through a box of old books and magazines. She found two Nancy Drew mysteries that she hadn't read yet and a picture book on pirates for JoJo.



"Could we get these too, Mom?" Nancy asked. "Please!"

The final bill for everything totaled fifteen dollars, counting the books and a tiny plastic pinball game that Dad had somehow laid his hands on when her mother wasn't looking. He carried the desk to their car.

"I hope you enjoy the desk," the lady said to Nancy. "My daughter used it for years. She was a very good student. You look like a good student too."

"I try my best to be diligent," Nancy said modestly. She figured the lady would know that diligent meant hardworking. "Is the desk an antique?" Nancy asked hopefully.

The lady laughed. "It's old, but I'm afraid I'm the only antique here."

Then the Clancys all piled into the car and made it home without JoJo regurgitating.





# THE SECRET COMPARTMENT

**B**efore we start painting, pull out all the drawers," Dad told Nancy.

The desk was standing on top of sheets of old newspaper that Nancy had spread out on the floor of the garage. The putty that her dad had put on the bottom of one leg had already hardened, so now the desk didn't wobble.

"It's going to look so gorgeous once we're done!" Nancy said happily. On the way home they'd stopped at the hardware store. Nancy picked out a large can of paint in a fancy shade of white called "alabaster" and a much smaller can of gold paint for the trim.



"Oh, look at this, Dad," Nancy said after she pulled open the end drawer. A small silver key was inside. "I wonder what it opens."

A moment later when she pulled out the next drawer, Nancy thought she might have the answer. At the very back of the drawer was a small keyhole. That certainly was an odd place for a keyhole to be. Just as that thought crossed her mind, Nancy noticed that this drawer, the one with the keyhole, wasn't as deep as the other.

Suddenly an icy little shiver wiggled through her. She held up the silver key to the keyhole. *Oui, oui, oui!* It was the same size.

"Dad!" Nancy gasped. "I think my desk has a secret compartment!" Just uttering the words "secret compartment" sent another bigger, icier shiver through her. This was like something straight out of a Nancy Drew mystery. Who knew what might be inside? A hidden jewel. A treasure map. A—

"What are you waiting for? Open it!"



With trembling fingers Nancy inserted the key. At least, she tried to.

Although it seemed to fit, the key wouldn't turn.

"Here. You try it, Daddy."

As soon as she handed over the key, her father said, "I see the problem. The tip is bent a little." He scratched his chin. "I know I have a small saw somewhere in here. I could try cutting out the front so you could see what's behind the keyhole."

"No!" Nancy yelped. She didn't want the drawer sawed open. That would wreck her desk before it even got into her room. Also, it seemed against the rules. If you were lucky enough to discover a secret compartment, it should be opened the proper way: with a key. Nancy was almost 100 percent positive that's what Nancy Drew would say.

Dad turned the key over in his hand. "I guess I could try hammering it. Maybe that would straighten it out."

"Yes, please, Daddy. Try that."

While her father hunted for the hammer, Nancy raced over to Bree's house.

Ooh la la! Bree was in her backyard jumping rope.



"Seventy-one, seventy-two," she counted, gasping for breath.

"Stop! Stop! Come with me, tout de suite." Nancy said it like this: "toot sweet." It was French for right now.

"Can't," Bree huffed. "Seventy-eight, seventy-nine . . ." At eighty-one, Bree tripped, and the jump rope went flying from her hands. "Thanks a bunch, Nancy. I was going for my personal best until you messed me up."

"Sorry! But this is important."

The minute Bree heard the mysterious words "secret compartment," she stopped being annoyed and scooted back to the garage with Nancy.

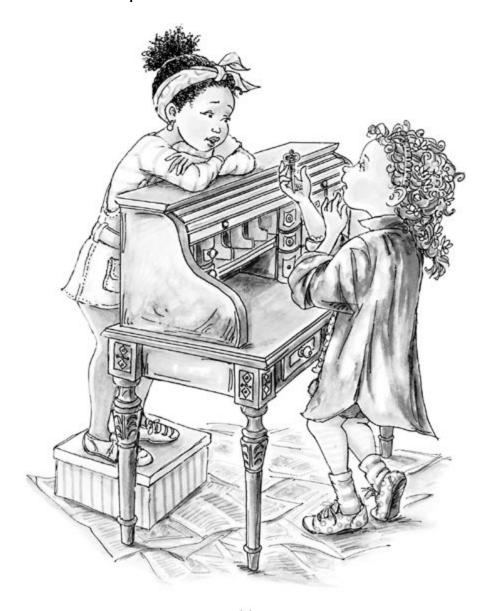
"I did my best," Nancy's dad informed her. "The key is still a little bent."

After Nancy showed Bree the special drawer, she took the key from her father and tried turning it gently in the keyhole. The lock seemed to give a little, so she pressed down on the key harder and pulled.

All at once, the door of the secret compartment swung open.

Nancy and Bree peered inside.

"So, tell me. Tell me. What's in there?" her father said. "I can't stand the suspense!"





# ANOTHER SILVER KEY

There was no jewelry. No treasure map, either. The only thing inside the secret compartment was . . . another key. Another silver key, although this one was bigger and fancier.

Nancy couldn't help feeling let down, although she said to Bree, "It must be important if somebody bothered hiding it in a secret compartment."

"Maybe something in one of the other drawers explains what it's for."

But the other drawers were all empty, which really didn't surprise Nancy. After she put the key back in the secret compartment, she turned to Bree. "So? Want to help me paint?"

Of course Bree did. Besides sleuthing, she and Nancy both loved to do interior decorating. That was the professional term for making your room look prettier. "Nice job, girls!" her mom said when they were finished applying the alabaster paint.

"With the gold, it's going to look so elegant," Bree said.

"Better wait for the white paint to dry," Nancy's momadvised.

While she was pulling off her smock, Nancy heard someone shouting to them.

"Hey! What are you guys doing?"

It was Grace. Nancy resisted the urge to look at Bree and make a face.

Grace pulled down the kickstand on her bike, a bike that was made in France and cost a fortune, according to Grace. She already had her helmet off and was walking over to the garage.



"It's my new desk. We're painting it."

"It doesn't look new. It looks old."

"It's new to me," Nancy told Grace. "And it's practically an antique."

"It has a secret compartment with a key!" Bree added.

Nancy had wanted to deliver that exciting bit of news herself. Still, it was very satisfying to hear Grace whistle and say, "No kidding!"

Proudly Nancy pointed at the special drawer that was drying on newspaper. "Don't touch it. The paint's wet. But

you can see the little door inside."

Grace bent down and whistled again. "So what was inside?"

"Another key," Nancy said.

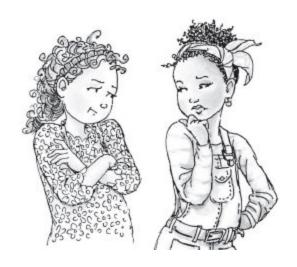
"What does it open?"

"We haven't got a clue," Nancy admitted.

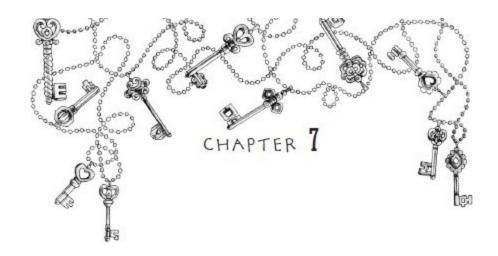
"Where'd you get the desk?"

After Grace heard about the tag sale, she said, "So, duh! Just go back there and ask whoever used to own the desk what the key is for."

Nancy and Bree turned to each other and scowled. Grace was right. Why hadn't they thought of that themselves? That worried Nancy. Maybe because it had been so long since their last mystery, their sleuthing skills were getting rusty!







### INTERROGATION

At lunch on Monday, Nancy and Bree sat at their usual table under the poster of the five food groups. Nancy had brought the silver key. She held it out for her friends to see while telling the story of how she found it.

Bree passed around a bag of veggie chips and said, "After school, we're going to bike over to the tag-sale house and ask the lady if she knows what the key is for."

"I get to come too," Grace said, appearing out of nowhere. She plopped down her tray and squeezed in next to Clara. "It was my idea, after all."

Nancy grit her teeth. Grace's eavesdropping skills were superb, Nancy had to admit. Grace always heard exactly what you didn't want her to.

"It was *my* idea," Grace repeated as she unwrapped her sandwich. "So it's only fair."

"Okay. On one condition: We ask all the questions," Nancy said. "You can't do any interrogating."

Once they had their helmets on, Nancy and Bree slipped on their trench coats. Nancy's was hot pink. Bree's was purple.

"It's hot. What do you need coats for?" Grace said.

"It so happens that these are the kind of coats detectives wear when they are sleuthing," Nancy informed Grace.

"Whatever," Grace said, and hopped on her made-in-France bike.

It was easy finding the way from school to the lady's house because she lived only two blocks over. After parking their bikes on her front lawn, Nancy knocked at the door. When the lady opened it, Nancy cleared her throat. Then, since she didn't know the lady's name, she smiled and said politely, "Madam, I hope we are not disturbing you. We need only a few minutes of your time."



"Oh, I remember you." The lady smiled back. "Your family came to the tag sale. You bought the rolltop desk." Suddenly she looked puzzled. "Is something wrong with it?"

"Oh, no! It's painted alabaster white now with gold trim and looks great."

"Well, what can I do for you girls?"

"We are trying to solve a mystery," Bree began.

Nancy dug in her trench coat pocket and showed the key to the lady. "This was in a hidden compartment in one of the desk drawers. I'm hoping you know what secret the key will reveal." "Reveal" was also one of Nancy's favorite words. It sounded so much more mysterious than "show."

The lady squinted at the key. "I have no earthly idea. Maybe my daughter knows. It used to be her desk. Would you like me to call her?"

"Thanks! That would be superb!" Nancy said.

The lady left them standing by the door. In less than five minutes she returned. "I'm afraid my daughter was no help either. All she said was that the key had always been there."

"Hmmmm." You couldn't even really count this as new information. Still, Nancy tried mulling over the lady's words.

"Well, was it—" Grace started to speak. But Nancy turned and looked at her sharply.

"Remember the rules."

Then suddenly Nancy thought of a question to ask. "Was the desk brand-new when you got it?"

"Rats. That was my question."

Nancy ignored Grace and was pleased when the lady replied, "No. The desk used to belong to our next-door neighbors."

Ooh la la! Now the investigation was getting somewhere! "The house with the green shutters?" Nancy asked, pointing. The lady nodded.

"Easy-peasy!" Bree exclaimed. "Let's go!"

"Oh, no, honey. The La Salles moved years ago. In fact, two different families have lived in that house since then."

"Where does the La Salle family live now?" Nancy took out her sleuthing notebook and pen.

"The last I heard, they were in New York City."

The Big Apple! How glamorous, although New York City was way too far away to bike to. "Do you have their phone number or an email address?"

"I did. But I don't know if either one is current. We haven't been in touch for years. And . . ." The lady paused

for a second. "Well, I'm sorry, but I really wouldn't be comfortable giving out that kind of information." The lady backed away from the front door. It was clear that she didn't want to be interrogated anymore. Suddenly Nancy started feeling more like a pest than a practically professional sleuth.

"We're sorry to have bothered you. And we thank you for your time," Nancy said sadly.

"Good luck!" the lady said.

Nancy and Bree turned to leave, but Grace butted in.

"Listen, if you do find an email address or something," she said to the lady, "you could write and see if your old neighbors would let us email them."

"Yesss." The lady drew out the word as if she were considering it. "I suppose I could do that."



"My name is Nancy, and this is my family's email address." Nancy wrote down clancyfamily@arrow.com and handed the slip of paper to the lady.

"Thanks so much," Nancy said, and pocketed her notepad. Then the three girls hopped back on their bikes and rode home. Nancy wasn't completely convinced the lady really would bother to try to track down her old neighbors. And Nancy certainly didn't like the way Grace had said "us" before, as if she were a part of the investigation. However, Nancy had to hand it to Grace. If not for her, their sleuthing would have come to a dead end. Sometimes it really paid off to be a pest!





# A BREAK In the case

Later that night, while Nancy was searching for something superb to put in the class time capsule, she heard her dad calling.

"Nancy, there's an email for you . . . at least I think it's for you. Do you know someone named Ann Tyler?"

Nancy zipped downstairs to the living room, where her father sat with his laptop computer.

"Let me see, Dad!" Nancy peered over her dad's shoulder at the screen.

Oui, oui! The email was from the tag-sale lady! Nancy read it out loud.

To: clancyfamily@arrow.com Hello, Nancy,

You are in luck. Here is the email address for Diana La Salle. I wrote her and it is fine for you to contact her

daughter, Olivia, who owned the desk. Here is Olivia's phone number. I hope you are able to solve the mystery.

Sincerely yours, Ann Tyler

Diana La Salle! Olivia La Salle. In her entire life, Nancy had never heard such elegant names. They sounded characters in a Nancy Drew book. Nice ones. Not evil ones. Nancy kept repeating the phone number aloud as she ran toward the kitchen to make the call.

"Hold on, Sherlock," her dad said. "What's going on here? What mystery?"

Nancy's mother and JoJo were sitting on the sofa with the tag-sale book on pirates. Her mother stopped reading. Now both her parents were looking at Nancy, waiting for an answer.

"It's kind of complicated," Nancy began.

Her mom and dad were not at all pleased when they heard she had biked over to a stranger's house.

"She isn't a stranger. We all were at her house for the tag sale!"

"That doesn't make her a close personal friend," her dad pointed out.

"But we didn't go inside. We just stood at the door."

After Nancy had apologized many times, she asked, "So? Will you let me call now? Please?"

Her parents relented, which was the grown-up way of saying they gave in.

"Merci. Merci beaucoup with sugar on top!" Nancy blew kisses at them. Then she thought of something. "Ooh, I have to inform Bree of this."

Upstairs in her room, Nancy sent off a message in their Top-Secret Special Delivery mailbox. It hung from a long rope strung in between their bedroom windows. Nancy rang the bell, which meant mail was coming.



There's been a break in the case! her note read. Can you come over tout de suite?

Bree arrived in a flash. Nancy had Olivia La Salle's number written down. She punched it in and held the receiver between them so they both could listen. What they learned was music to their ears. Not only had the desk belonged to Olivia La Salle, but she was quite sure she knew what the silver key opened. "If you'd like to come over, I can show you," she offered.

After Nancy and Bree hung up, they jumped up and down and then high-fived each other. Fortunately, Olivia La Salle no longer lived in Gotham, which was another name for New York City. She lived in a town that was fifteen minutes away by car.



Unfortunately, neither of Nancy's parents could spare the time to drive there until the weekend. Though only a few days away, the weekend seemed impossibly far into the future. No way could Nancy and Bree wait that long.

"Let me see what I can do!" Bree said, and sped back to her house.

Nancy waited in her room for the bell to ring. When it did, she reeled in the rope and opened the note in the basket.

Chérie, my dad will take us tomorrow after school!

Nancy opened the secret compartment and gazed at the silver key. Soon its secret would be revealed. Knowing that made her shiver with pleasure.





# THE TIME CAPSULE

The next day, Grace was absent, which solved the problem of whether to invite her sleuthing. Many kids came in with stuff for the time capsule, which was a big box from Sibley's department store. Lionel brought in a whoopee cushion. Bree had a long printed-out bill from a supermarket register. She said, "Kids of the future can see what milk and ice cream and cereal and lots of other food used to cost."



Bree beamed when Mr. D said, "What a superb idea."

Joel, who wanted to be an astronaut, had a Lego rocket ship. Clara brought in very shiny coins, a penny, a nickel, and a dime.

"Won't there still be money fifty years from now?" Tamar wanted to know.



Mr. D wasn't sure. "By then everybody might be using plastic money cards instead of real money."

"My coins were made this year." Clara showed the class where the date was on each. "So in fifty years, they'll be exactly fifty years old."

In the afternoon, during creative writing, Nancy continued the latest exploits—which were adventures but

more exciting—of Lucette Fromage. She was a nine-year-old girl Nancy had made up.

This time, Nancy decided to have Lucette Fromage magically travel back in time to Paris, France, hundreds of years ago.

Nancy began writing. "Lucette found herself in a castle garden where a beautiful lady said "Bonjour" to her. She was dressed in a *très*-fancy gown and carried a lace parasol. Although the lady was young, her hair was white. That was because she was wearing a big, powdered wig.

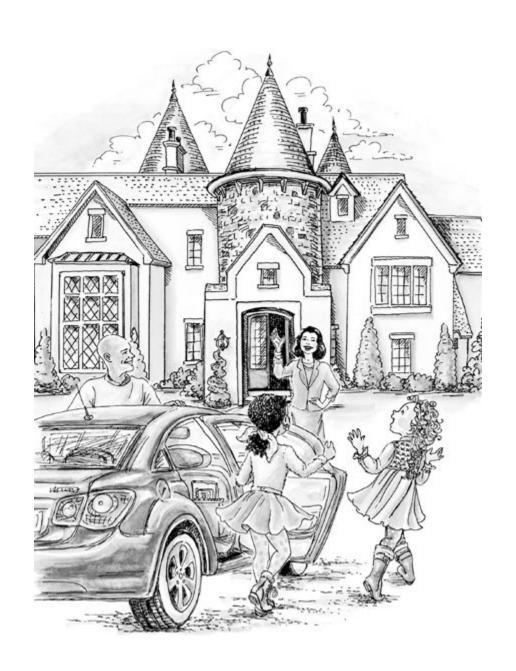
"Tout de suite Lucette realized this lady was the queen of France."

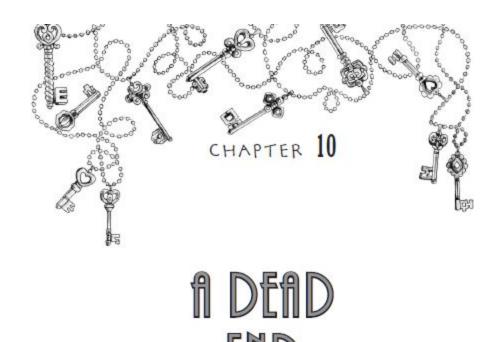
Nancy put down her pencil and thought about what should come next. Last week she had read a book about this queen. Her name was Marie. The queen loved jewels and eating cake. But she didn't care about the poor people of Paris, France. Nancy began writing again.

"Lucette curtsied and said, 'Your Majesty, I come from the future and I am here to warn you. You must act nicer to peasant-folk or they will do something terrible to you!"

Even writing fast, the last bell rang before Nancy had finished her story. She grabbed her backpack and she and Bree were outside the school building in record time.







"Hi, Pop!" Bree shouted, waving. Her father waved back from inside the first car in a long line that snaked down the block.

As soon as they were buckled into their seat belts, off they went to visit Olivia La Salle.

Bree's dad had GPS in his car, so driving to Olivia La Salle's house was a cinch.

Nancy loved listening to the sophisticated voice of the GPS lady, who announced in practically no time, "You have arrived at your destination."

Ooh la la! The house was a genuine McMansion. It was brand-new and big—really big—with the kind of tower that Nancy knew was called a turret. Castles often came with turrets.

Olivia La Salle greeted them at the door. Double ooh la la. She was glamorous. Her wavy red hair looked as if she had just left a beauty salon. Her makeup was applied perfectly. When she smiled, both her top and bottom teeth showed. "So who's the proud new owner of my desk?"

"I am. I'm Nancy Clancy, and this is my best friend, Bree, and her dad, Mr. Sylvester James."

"Well, I think it was very enterprising of you girls to track me down," she said cheerily, and motioned everyone inside. "We'll go in the family room and you can see what your key opens."



As soon as they walked into the front hall, Bree's dad snapped his fingers. "It just hit me." He shook his head and chuckled. "I knew you looked familiar, and now I recognize the voice—you're on Channel Three News."

Olivia La Salle laughed merrily. "Guilty as charged." She spread both arms out. "Olivia La Salle—your Channel Three Weather Gal."

Nancy, who was following behind the grown-ups, couldn't help letting out a gasp. She turned to Bree. She looked equally stunned.

This was almost too good to be true. Not only did Nancy's desk come with a mystery, it used to belong to a celebrity! A television personality!

They were shown into a room with the largest flat-screen TV Nancy had ever seen.

"So, ladies, shall we get down to business?" Olivia La Salle said. While she searched through a cabinet, Nancy took the silver key from her pocket. What would it unlock? Probably something important from Olivia La Salle's past. Maybe a keepsake box with memories of her first sweetheart—stuff like dead flowers, photos, and love letters. Or a diary that Olivia La Salle had kept when she was a young girl with big dreams of becoming a Weather Gal.

Olivia La Salle turned. She was holding a jewelry box. It was pink fake leather with a gold design around the rim. Nancy had one just like it. It was a birthday present from her grandma.



"So open it! What are you waiting for?" Olivia La Salle laughed her merry laugh again. But then she took a closer look at the key in Nancy's hand. Everyone could see it was much too big to fit into the tiny lock on the jewelry box. "Aw, gee. And I was so sure I had stashed the key in the desk you have now—to keep my jewelry safe from my sister."

"In the desk drawer with the secret compartment?" Nancy asked.

"Secret compartment? No, I never knew about any secret compartment." When the lady shook her head, her hairdo didn't move. "Gee, I'm sorry. You came all the way over here, and I haven't been any help solving your mystery." Then the lady made a goofy face with her lower lip pooched out, like a baby about to cry.

Bree's dad laughed. "That's the face you make on TV when bad weather's coming!"

"At least let me show you what happens when the jewelry box is opened. It's so cute. All I need is a paper clip." She went over to a big desk in the corner.

Nancy and Bree both knew what they'd see. Still, they pretended to act surprised when a little plastic ballerina popped up from the top tray. The little ballerina twirled around to the same music as Nancy's did.

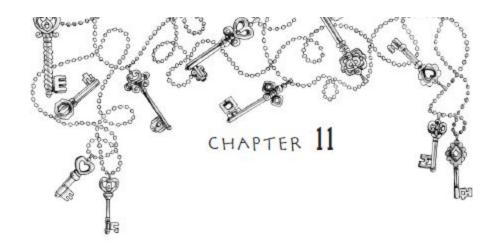


"That's very enchanting," Nancy said to be polite. "Enchanting" was a more interesting word than "lovely."

Five minutes later, the GPS lady was directing them home. Sad to say, the mystery had reached a dead end. Still, meeting a genuine celebrity wasn't something that happened every day. Before they left, Olivia La Salle had presented both Nancy and Bree with a photograph of herself.

She had written, Here's to blue skies! From Olivia La Salle, your Channel 3 Weather Gal.





# MORE Sleuthing

Nancy was writing at her alabaster-white desk. Her story about Lucette Fromage was almost finished. Nancy was 100 percent positive that writing at a desk rather than at a play table gave her more inspired ideas.

At this point Nancy had to decide whether Lucette would reveal to the queen of France that she was going to get her head chopped off! Perhaps it would make a better story if Queen Marie wasn't told and decided, all on her own, to be kinder to the poor people of France. Yes! That was how Nancy would end it.

Done and done! Nancy put her story in her backpack. But mystery was kind of like a mosquito bite. It was hard not to keep scratching it. The photo of Olivia La Salle was now taped on the wall right above Nancy's desk.

The Weather Gal had not revealed the secret to the silver key. But maybe the problem was that Nancy and Bree had not asked enough questions. Suddenly Nancy wished she could snap her fingers the way Bree's dad could, because something occurred to her. They hadn't asked Olivia La Salle a very basic question.

Nancy scooted over to Bree's house. Maybe they hadn't hit a dead end after all.

A message on Olivia La Salle's telephone:

"Hello, Ms. La Salle. It's Nancy and Bree. We forgot one thing to ask you. Would you please call this number at your earliest convenience? Thank you."

"I didn't expect her to be home," Bree said, glancing at the clock on her desk. "She's probably at the TV station, getting ready for the weather report. The news goes on in half an hour."

"You're right." Nancy blew through her lips and fell back on Bree's bed. "It'll be ages before she calls back . . . if she even bothers to."

Waiting was one of Nancy's absolute least-favorite things to do.

"I know!" Nancy sat up. "Let's call her at the TV station."

Bree scrunched up her nose. She was more patient than Nancy was. But not by much. She looked over at her photo of Olivia La Salle. It was already in a frame on her bedside table. "What if she starts thinking we're pests?"



"She won't. Remember how she said we were enterprising to track her down?" Then Nancy reminded Bree that a good sleuth needed to be persistent. That meant being stubborn, but in a good way.

"That's true," Bree said, considering Nancy's point. "Okay! Let's do it!"

The telephone book was in the kitchen. It was decided that Bree would make the call because her voice sounded more mature than Nancy's. They held the phone between them while Bree punched in the number.

"Good evening. This is WJIM. How may I help you?" a voice said. It sounded a lot like the voice of the GPS lady.

Bree squeezed Nancy's hand hard. "Hello. May I please speak to Olivia La Salle, the Weather Gal?"

There was a pause on the other end of the line. "Who is calling, please?"

"My name is Bree James."

"Ms. La Salle is in makeup now. Is she expecting your call?"

"Not exactly. My friend and I visited her yesterday. Please, it'll only take a second."

Another pause.

"Hold on while I see if she is available."

With their free hands, both Nancy and Bree crossed their fingers.

It was only a moment later before they heard the jolly voice of Olivia La Salle asking, "Hi there. What's up?"

"Ms. La Salle, we forgot to ask something."

"Fire away, Bree."

"Was the desk brand-new when you got it?"

"No, it wasn't. It used to belong to my aunt Elizabeth."

Ooh la la! The trail was no longer at a dead end!

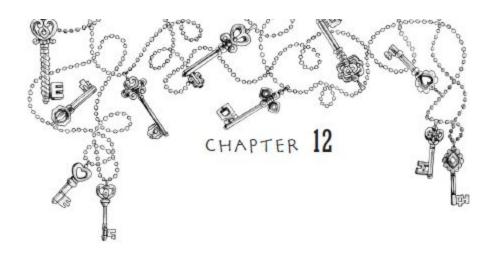
"Would your aunt mind if we got in touch with her?" Bree asked.

It took just a minute for Olivia La Salle to find her aunt's email address.

Nancy raced to get a pen and paper for Bree.

"My aunt is going to get a real kick out of you girls," Olivia La Salle said, and then before she hung up, she added, "Here's a little weather tip: Wear raincoats tomorrow!"





# A SUPERB Clue

The time capsule was filling up. Mr. Dudeny had brought in a campaign button from the last time people voted for president. Nola had a bunch of stamps in an envelope, which she claimed would be worth a bundle of money in fifty years. Grace brought in stubs from movie tickets and a photo of the shopping mall. "The titles of the movies are on the stubs so kids of the future can see what was popular with kids of the past."

"Hold on! That's us you're talking about! We're not the past. Not yet," Tamar pointed out.



Nancy still hadn't settled on what to add to the time capsule. And tomorrow was the deadline. So far it was between a yellow felt pennant that said *Ada M. Draezel Elementary School* or the 3D class picture, which her parents were not eager to part with. Neither really seemed that special.

At lunch Grace asked in a sarcastic voice, "So how is your little investigation going?"

"Very well, *merci beaucoup,*" Nancy said. Since Grace had been absent yesterday when Bree and Nancy had shown the class their photos of Olivia La Salle, Nancy had the pleasure of repeating the whole story for Grace.

"We're waiting to hear from her aunt Elizabeth now," Bree said.

Grace just kept eating her sandwich and didn't reply.

When Nancy got home that afternoon, her mom said, "You and Bree can expect a visitor in about forty-five minutes." It turned out that Olivia La Salle's aunt Elizabeth lived in the retirement community downtown.



Nancy and Bree had cookies and lemonade waiting in the clubhouse for their guest, who arrived right on time. A very tall lady, taller even than Nancy's dad, hopped out of a blue sports car.

Nancy figured Aunt Elizabeth would be old. And she was. But Nancy hadn't expected her to be wearing a Beatles T-shirt, neon-green tights, or orange high tops. Her gray hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she had a bag with a rolled-up gym mat slung over her shoulder.

Aunt Elizabeth—who introduced herself as Miss Simon—explained that she was on her way to yoga class. "But your message sounded urgent, so here I am."



Urgent? Nancy had never heard that word before, but she could tell it meant serious and important.

"Yes. It's most urgent," Nancy agreed.

The girls led Miss Simon to Nancy's room.

"Wow! It certainly looks a lot fancier now," she said upon seeing the desk. She went straight to the drawer with the secret compartment and opened it. "This was the niftiest thing about the desk. It was like something in a Nancy Drew mystery."

"You liked Nancy Drew?" Nancy and Bree both exclaimed. "Well. of course I did!"

Now came the all-important question. "Do you know what the silver key opens?" Nancy asked.

Miss Simon took the key from the secret compartment and held it her hand. The way she just kept staring at it, not saying a word, began to get a little spooky. Finally she spoke. "The key doesn't open anything."



Say what?! That was definitely not the right answer! But then Miss Simon continued. "I used to wear this key on a long chain around my neck. My best friend had one exactly like it. We bought them together and swore never to take them off. It meant our friendship would last forever."

"But you did take it off. It was in the drawer," Bree pointed out.

"My family moved to a new town, and after a while I stopped wearing it. The two of us meant to stay best friends, but that didn't happen." Miss Simon shook her head, then shrugged. "Still, the key was important to me, so I kept it in the secret compartment. . . . I haven't seen it in—well, it must be close to fifty years."

There was no time for refreshments because Miss Simon didn't want to be late for her yoga class. Nancy gave her back the silver key and Miss Simon took off in her car, leaving Nancy and Bree in the clubhouse eating cookies and drinking lemonade. They weren't despondent, which was way, way sadder than sad. But they were both very let down.

"At least we solved the mystery," Bree said, sighing. Then she scraped off all the white part of an Oreo with her teeth. "But I wanted a happy, exciting ending."

"Me too," Nancy said. "In a book it would have turned out much better."

After Bree left, Nancy stayed to polish off the last cookie.

Then she stood and dusted off cookie crumbs. That's when she noticed the red spiral-bound album. The one Mrs. DeVine had brought over the other day.

Nancy took it back to her room for safekeeping. On most Saturdays Nancy and Bree were invited to tea at Mrs. DeVine's. She would return it then.

Sitting cross-legged on her bed, Nancy leafed through the album. Mrs. DeVine, who was Marjorie or Margie back then, had pasted in postcards from places her family had visited on vacations as well as lots of photos of people Nancy figured were relatives.



On one page was a strip of three photos of Mrs. DeVine and her old best friend, which had been taken in a photo booth. In each photo, the two girls were making goofy faces. Nancy was impressed at how Mrs. DeVine could make her eyes go completely crossed. But that wasn't what caught Nancy's attention. In the last picture the friends were each holding something up to the camera. Nancy swallowed hard. She was pretty sure she could make out what was in their hands, but she wanted to be 100 percent positive. So she got out her magnifying glass, the special one for sleuthing that had rhinestones on it.

Oui, oui, oui! She definitely was seeing what she thought she saw.

She dashed off a message to Bree and sent it off in the mail basket.

Come tout de suite! it said.

But Bree didn't show up until after dinner. And she wasn't all that astonished when Nancy held the magnifying glass over the photo.

"See what they're holding, Bree? Keys! Silver keys that are on long chains around their necks!"

"So you think that proves Aunt Elizabeth—I mean, Miss Simon—used to be Mrs. DeVine's best friend?" Bree looked skeptical.

Nancy nodded. "I'm almost positive." Actually she wasn't, but she wanted it to be true.

Bree was shaking her head. "You can't even tell if the keys are silver. The pictures are in black-and-white."

"That's true. But you can't tell that they aren't silver."

"I know how to get to the bottom of this," Bree said.

They went downstairs to use the computer. Bree fired off an email to Miss Simon. All it said was, We forgot to ask something. When you were a kid, did you have a nickname?

Later that evening, Nancy was reading one of her new Nancy Drew books when her mom looked up from the computer and said, "Sweetie, there's an email for you."

The moment Nancy finished reading it, she started screaming and hopping up and down.

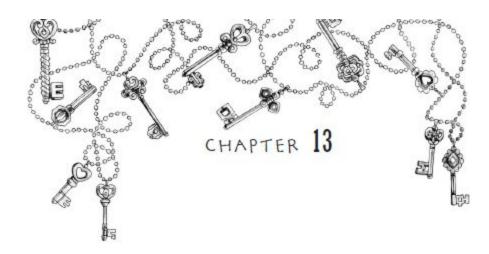


"Did we just win the lottery?" her dad asked.

Nancy didn't answer. She was already halfway up the stairs.

This is what her message to Bree said: Chérie. *Miss Simon had a nickname! It was Bitsy!!!!!!!!!!* 





# MYSTERY SOLVED

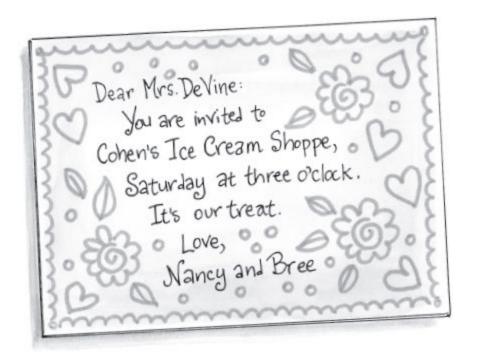
"You're putting a friendship bracelet in the time capsule?" Grace looked at Nancy and rolled her eyes. "That's dumb."

Mr. Dudeny heard her. "Grace, remember how you and I have talked—several times—about treating classmates with respect?"

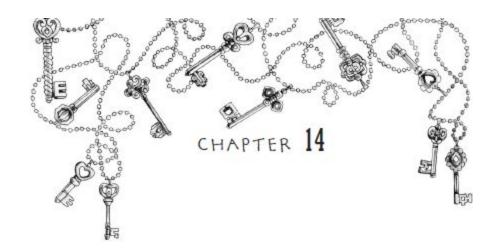
Grace didn't answer. Mr. D stood staring at her, waiting. Finally Grace said, "Sorry, Nancy."

Nancy didn't care whether Grace thought the friendship bracelet was dumb. Attached to it were instructions for making a friendship bracelet, in case kids of the future didn't know how, as well as a photo of Bree and herself. On the back she had written the date, their names, and the words "Best friends forever." When the time capsule would be opened, she and Bree would be old ladies, as old as Mrs. DeVine and—Nancy stopped, because she could feel her brain getting all twisted up in that weird way again.

At lunch Nancy and Bree explained to their friends how they had solved the secret of the silver key and what they were planning for Saturday.







## REUNION

"I must say, you girls are acting awfully mysterious," Mrs. DeVine said as they took their seats in a booth at Cohen's Ice Cream Shoppe.

Nancy and Bree giggled but didn't answer. Nancy was so excited she couldn't sit still. Neither could Bree. She was squirming around as if she had ants in her pants.

It was 2:58, according to the giant clock that had hands in the shape of ice cream cones. Nancy pretended to look at the menu when actually her eyes were trained on the front door.



At 3:01, Aunt Elizabeth or Miss Simon or Bitsy, as she used to be called, walked in.

"Over here!" Bree stood up, waving.

Miss Simon smiled and headed for their booth. Then all of a sudden she stopped and blinked. Her hand flew to her mouth. Nancy looked across the table at Mrs. DeVine. She had the same startled expression. Her hand was pressed against her chest.



"No! It can't be!" Mrs. DeVine cried. Her eyes were open as wide as a doll's. "Bitsy?"

"Margie?"

Nancy and Bree bounced in their seats triumphantly as Mrs. DeVine rose with her arms outstretched.

Oui! Oui! Nancy and Bree had pulled it off. A surprise reunion!

The old friends hugged and kissed and cried a little.

"Oh, look. I got lipstick smeared all over you!" Mrs. DeVine said, sitting down. She took a napkin from the dispenser and began rubbing Miss Simon's cheek.

"And your mascara is running! You have raccoon eyes!" Miss Simon said.

Then they turned to each other and hugged and kissed and cried some more.

When the ladies finally settled down, Mrs. DeVine asked Nancy and Bree, "How on earth did you find Bitsy?"

So they went through the whole story, step by step. "It all started with a silver key that I found in my desk."

"Your desk? What was it doing there?" Mrs. DeVine looked puzzled.

"The desk used to belong to Miss Simon. It wound up at a tag sale. That's where Nancy got it," Bree explained.

"Your rolltop desk?" Mrs. DeVine asked Miss Simon. Then she addressed Nancy and Bree. "Oh, was I jealous. *My* desk didn't have a secret compartment."

"Do you still have yours?" Miss Simon wanted to know. "The silver key, I mean?"

"Oh yes!" Mrs. DeVine replied. "In my jewelry box."

It turned out that the ladies now lived only ten minutes away from each other.

"I was living in Mexico for years, but the hot weather got to be too much for me," Miss Simon explained. "So I moved back here of all places. To the Geezers' Palace."

Mrs. DeVine laughed. "I assume you are talking about Elwood Retirement Community."

Right away the ladies began updating each other on the facts of their lives.

Bitsy had never married—"too much trouble," she said—and had lived all over the world. She used to be a journalist, which Nancy knew was the professional name for a reporter.

Mrs. DeVine told Bitsy about the beauty salon that she had owned. Its name was Hair and Now. Nancy and Bree already knew that. But they hadn't realized that their neighbor had been married three times!



"I have three children, one from each husband. But no grandchildren, not yet." Mrs. DeVine pointed at Nancy and Bree. "They're my substitute granddaughters."

A waiter appeared with menus for everyone and said, "I'll be back in a minute to take your orders, ladies."

"No, wait. Do you girls know what you want?" Miss Simon asked Nancy and Bree.

"We'll each have the Death by Chocolate, please," Nancy said. Whenever they came to Cohen's, that was always what they ordered. It came with two scoops of chocolate ice cream on a giant brownie in a pool of hot-fudge sauce, topped with chocolate-flavored whipped cream. Heaven!



"And you, ma'am, what would you like?" the waiter asked Mrs. DeVine. Mrs. DeVine was about to order but Miss Simon interrupted. "Margie here will have coffee ice cream with butterscotch sauce and slivered almonds, please."

"That's absolutely correct," Mrs. DeVine said. "And Bitsy here would like two scoops of strawberry ice cream with sprinkles—the multicolored ones—and a mountain of whipped cream."

Both ladies marveled over how they still remembered what ice cream the other one liked. But that didn't strike Nancy as surprising. Of course your best friend would know all the important stuff about you!

Their orders arrived, and as usual Nancy had to help Bree finish off the last part of her brownie. The ladies were busy exchanging phone numbers and email addresses. By the time everyone was ready to leave, they had made dinner plans for the following Tuesday. And they were both going to wear their silver keys on a chain around their necks—just like they used to.



At the parking lot behind Cohen's, Miss Simon pulled out her car keys and was heading for her car, when Nancy whispered something to Bree.

"We want both of you to take a solemn oath," Nancy said.

"That's right." Bree nodded. "You have to promise to stay friends this time—forever."

After raising their right hands, the ladies repeated Bree's words.

Then, just to be doubly sure, Nancy made them pinkie lock on it!

### **CREDITS**

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FIRST EDITION



**JANE O'CONNOR** is truly a native New Yorker. She was born and raised on the glamorous Upper West Side and, after graduating from Smith College, returned to the metropolis (that's fancy for city) to begin a career in publishing. Currently Jane works as an editor for Penguin Books for Young Readers.

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